

**EXPANDING THE THIRD-PERSON EFFECT:
AN ANALYSIS OF THIRD-PERSON PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORAL
CONSEQUENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF NEWS COVERAGE OF SOCIAL
PROTEST**

by

Amy L. Shupard

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication

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ABSTRACT

The third-person effect occurs when participants who see a stimulus material think that others are more affected by media content than they are affected, and as a result of this effect, are likely to support censoring this media material.

In this study, news stories were shown for both pro choice and pro life protests; on either side of the abortion issue, versions portrayed the protesters positively or negatively. It was predicted that third person effects would be greater as social distance increased and when the news story was perceived to be contrary to one's own beliefs about abortion. In addition, it was predicted that as third-person effects increased in size, so would the desire to censor the media content in question. Students enrolled at a large mid-Atlantic university completed surveys that were designed to test the hypotheses of this study.

Overall, results supported the predicted relationship between the third person effect and viewing a news story that contradicted one's own beliefs on the abortion issue. Pro life participants' third-person effects were affected by gender and prior attitudes toward protest, while pro choice participants' third-person effects were more affected by the treatment of the news story they viewed. In addition, results showed support for relationship between the third-person effect and social distance. No support was found for the relationship between the third-person effect and the desire to restrict or censor protesters' expressive rights.

The results of this study support prior third-person research by showing a third-person perception as well as support for social distance. The major contribution

of this study is that it found that a third-person perception can be detected when exposing subjects to a news story about protest. In addition, third-person effects do differ when participants are able to judge for themselves whether the stimulus material in question is pro social or anti social in nature.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

During the decade of the 1990s, third-person perception research emerged as one of the most popular areas of research in the field of mass communication. This research examines the common tendency for individuals to think the effect of mass media messages is greater on others than it is on the self. According to one review of third-person effects research (Perloff, 1999, p. 354), “over 45 published articles - and dozens of convention papers - have examined components of the TPE hypothesis.”

Despite the fact that so many articles have explored this topic, a steady flow of research continues to refine our understanding of third-person concepts and their consequences by expanding research into new media contexts.

The majority of third-person effects research has focused on effects of content that is either definitively antisocial or prosocial. The results of studies that use antisocial stimulus material have consistently demonstrated the third-person phenomenon (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Hwa, 1996; McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997). Those studies that use prosocial content, however, have been inconclusive in their findings (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Eveland & McLeod, 1999). The novelty of the current study is that it used pro life and pro choice abortion protests as the content referent (i.e., the content about which respondents make effects judgments). This content differs from the referent material used in other third-person effects research because audience members can perceive the

material to be either prosocial or antisocial depending on the individual's position on the abortion issue. In addition, participants judged the content to be pro or antisocial, rather than having the researcher predetermine the nature of the news story.

This research project was primarily a third-person effects study; however, it used protest news coverage as its context. The study examined whether subjects rated protest stories as negative or positive, and how subjects perceived others to be affected in relation to the amount that the self is affected (third-person perception). It also assessed the extent to which third-person perceptions cause participants to desire restrictions on the expressive rights of the protest groups in question (third-person effect). Finally, the study examined the relationship between the third-person perception and the social distance corollary, the tendency to see the perceived effect on others increase as the difference between the self and the party in question increases.

Significance of the Research

The third-person perception is the idea that others are more affected by media content than the self is affected. This perception has been linked to attitudinal as well as behavioral outcomes (the third-person effect). The effect of the third-person perception is manifested in the desire to balance the impact of media content in some way, such as censoring content or changing public policy (Davison, 1983). The need for furthering third-person research lies in its relationships to the behavioral components of the third-person effect. People who exhibit the third-person perception will think they are relatively unaffected by media content compared with "others" around them. As a result, if they perceive the content to be negative or harmful, they may feel the need to engage in some form of censorship to protect those "others" who

cannot protect themselves from such content (McLeod et al., 1997). Censorship is a clear violation of free speech; the desire to engage in this type of behavior threatens the rights of individuals in this country. Were this to become a more widespread phenomenon, it could lead to an unnecessary violation of American rights.

Although the third-person perception has been studied among a variety of different types of media content, it has not yet been examined in relation to media coverage of social protest. This is an important third-person perception context for two reasons. First, protest is an important form of public expression in a democratic society. It can be a source of progressive social change and provide motivation for examination of social policy (McLeod, 1995). To the extent that members of the public express hostility or the desire to restrict the expressive rights of protestors, the marketplace of ideas is shortchanged. Thus, understanding antecedents to restrictive attitudes toward protesters, such as the third-person perception, is an important area of inquiry. Second, protest groups often reach the public with their messages through mass media coverage. Their access to the marketplace of idea is dependent upon media organizations' willingness and motivation to cover protest events fairly. This may be discourages if the public (media audience) feels restrictive toward news stories that give attention to social protest groups. Therefore, it is also important to understand the antecedents to restrictiveness toward media coverage of protest.

The Third-person Effect

The third-person effect can be segmented into two components: the third-person perception and the third-person effect or the behavioral component. The third-person perception can be characterized by people's tendency to feel that they are less affected by certain media content than are those around them (Perloff, 1996).

Theorists have suggested that the underlying reason why third-person perceptions exist is that people are motivated by the need for “ego-enhancement.” According to ego-enhancement theory, individuals engage in practices that make them feel better about themselves (Davison, 1983). If this is indeed the underlying rationale for the third-person phenomenon, it would be logical for someone to think general “others” are more affected than they themselves are affected. In addition, the “hostile media phenomenon” (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985) has shown that when individuals are highly involved in media content or hold a very strong opinion, they may be likely to feel that the media is biased against their position. Logically speaking, then, it would make sense that if people hold very strong opinions, they will be likely to think that both the media offer a perspective that is biased against their own and that others will be more willing to believe that perspective.

A study by McLeod et al. (1997) examined the use of misogynistic and violent rap lyrics to assess third-person effects. This study found support for the third-person perception; people were likely to believe that others would be more influenced by violent lyrics than the self would be influenced. This is just one context of third-person research; however, many contexts have yielded support for the third-person perception within this area of research. Other contexts of third-person research have covered, but are not limited to defamatory newspaper articles, pornography, public service announcements, advertisements, and political messages (Cohen et al., 1988; Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999; Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Hwa, 1996; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; McLeod et al., 1997; Morrison, Johnson, & Ross, 2002; Price, Huang & Tewksbury, 1998). Based on the many contexts in which the third-person perception has been studied, this concept is clearly applicable to many

different areas. Therefore, in future research, the third-person perception could easily be studied within the context of news coverage of social protest.

In addition, third-person perception research includes the concept of “the social distance corollary,” which attempts to explain the differences between perceived impact on the self and perceived impact on an “other” comparison group (Cohen et al., 1988). The social distance corollary states that the amount of perceived difference between impact of media content on the self and others is related to the definition of “others.” This concept is based on what is termed an “out-group bias,” in which a person will rate a group that differs from one’s own group as less favorable than his/her own group. According to this premise, people are likely to rate groups of people who are different from them as being more affected by harmful media content than groups of people that are similar to them (Cohen et al., 1988).

While the social distance corollary is the primary explanation for third-person perceptions, some research has proposed that there are alternate models to account for third-person differentials. In their study, Eveland and his colleagues (1999) proposed an alternate model of the social distance corollary in which the third-person differential is a function of exposure and age, rather than social distance. Results of their study showed that when presented with violent rap lyrics, subjects rated groups that were younger than their own age group as being more affected by the media content, and groups that were older as less affected than their own age (Eveland et al., 1999). This study yielded some interesting findings pertaining to third-person research. However, it can be argued that what accounts for third-person differentials is context specific, and varies with each study. In the case of this particular study, the stimulus material was comprised of news stories, rather than violent rap lyrics. Most

people are likely to have access and are exposed to news broadcasts. For this reason, this study examined third-person differentials in terms of social distance , which is the dominant rationale for third-person perceptions.

The amount of difference one perceives between the self and others has been linked to the desire to equalize media effects by protecting others from harmful media content. For instance, people may feel the need to censor media content or to change public policy regarding the media (Davison, 1983). This third-person effect can have negative implication for society. McLeod et al., (1997) demonstrated that people with large “third-person differentials” (the difference between perceived effects on others and perceived effects on the self) would be relatively more likely to advocate attempts to restrict and/or censor media content. The desire for censorship that could arise from this phenomenon could threaten support for First Amendment freedoms.

Most studies that have found support for the third-person effect have studied media messages that contain definitively negative/antisocial messages. In these studies, messages generally contradict the opinions of most people and are likely to be seen as harmful; therefore, studies of this kind usually evoke a third-person effect (Perloff, 1996). Some content used in these studies includes, but is not limited to libel, television violence, and pornography (Cohen et al., 1988; Eveland et al., 1999; Gunther, 1995; McLeod et al., 1997; Salwen, 1998). However, the findings pertaining to the existence of the third-person effect using a positive/prosocial message have been inconclusive. For example, when the message content was prosocial, some studies have still found a third-person effect, while others have found a reverse third-person effect, and still others have found no effect at all (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Henriksen & Flora, 1999). This study is unique in that is

used referent material that can be seen as either antisocial or prosocial in nature. In this way, the study assessed the third-person perception in relation to both anti and prosocial messages, while allowing participants to judge the nature of the message.

Media Coverage of Social Protest as a Third-person Context

Another area of research in media effects pertains to news media coverage of social protest. This research has shown that news media frame stories to portray protest groups as more negative than they truly are. The media will often emphasize negative or violent actions of the protest groups and minimize the positive messages the protest groups seek to communicate (Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Shoemaker, 1984). The media have the power to bias audience opinion of a protest group and audience attitudes toward that group by portraying the group members as deviant (McLeod, 1995).

The media's framing of news stories is detrimental to the message of protest groups in society. However, when the concept of framing is joined with the notion of the third-person perception, it presents a clear threat to constitutional rights in the United States. Behavioral consequences of third-person perceptions could include the desire to censor news coverage of protests. In addition, third-person perceptions may make people think the protesters are not newsworthy, which may be a subtler form of censorship. Altogether, framing and third-person perceptions could present a direct threat to the rights of protesters and the democratic free marketplace of ideas in this country.

Research Questions and Theoretical Contributions

This study will analyze the third-person phenomenon when using news stories about abortion protest as stimuli. First, the study analyzed the extent of the third-person perception. Because there are two sides of the issue, respondents were likely to feel that their own side is prosocial in nature and the opposing side is antisocial. As a result, this study was able to analyze the third-person differential when the content was viewed as both prosocial and antisocial. In addition, the third-person differential was also measured - this measured the perceived difference between the self and “others.” Next, the study examined the behavioral component of the third-person differential by attempting to detect any desire to restrict the expressive rights of protesters. Finally, the study assessed the extent to which people found the topic of the news story to be newsworthy. Although respondents would not choose to censor news coverage, they might have a tendency to feel that the group in question is not worthy of news coverage if the message is antisocial.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL RATIONALE

The concept of the third-person is comprised of two components: the first component is termed the “third-person perception.” This perception is characterized by individuals’ tendencies to think others around them are more affected by media content than they themselves are affected. The second component, the third-person effect, occurs when third-person perceptions are linked to behavioral outcomes, such as the desire to censor media content that is deemed harmful to others. The third-person perception has also been linked to a desire to change certain public policies (Davison, 1983).

The majority of studies in this area have found support for a third-person perception. However, the support was generally found when using a definitively negative or antisocial message as a content referent material. Studies using content that is perceived to be prosocial or positive in nature have been inconclusive in their findings (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Thorson, 1992). When using material that is prosocial in nature, the expectation would be that a reverse third-person perception would emerge. This perception has been termed a “first-person perception,” in which people would be likely to think the self is affected more than others around them are affected (Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Thorson, 1992). Despite its logical rationale, support for the first-person perception has been much less robust than the support found for the third-person perception. Some studies using this type of content

have found a first-person perception, others have found a traditional third-person perception, and others still have found no difference in perception (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Thorson, 1992).

One goal of third-person research is to discern what can account for this perceived difference between the self and others. The primary explanation for the distance between the perceived effect on the self and others has been termed the social distance corollary (Cohen et al., 1988). This concept refers to the tendency to judge groups that differ from one's own group as being more affected by media content than are members of their own group. The farther a group is from one's own in social distance, the more affected the individual will believe members of the group to be (Cohen et al., 1988). Many studies have found support for the notion of social distance and its ability to explain the difference between the perceived impact on the self and the impact on others. The name given to this difference between the self and others is called the third-person differential (Eveland et al., 1999).

This study is an examination of the third-person phenomenon using news stories about social protests as the media content in question. One of this study's contributions to third-person literature is that it measured respondents' perceptions of the media content's potential harm, rather than assuming the content to be prosocial or antisocial. The study attempted to gauge both participants' position on the abortion issue and their perception of the story in question. In other words, this study contributed to third-person literature by examining the importance of individual differences in respondents' orientation toward the media content.

Theoretical Grounding

The third-person perception states that people are likely to feel that media content affects others more than it affects the self. The “third-person” refers to the general “other” rather than referring to the self or a particular other person. This perception process is grounded in the theory of ego-enhancement, which asserts that individuals engage in strategies to maintain positive feelings about themselves. Many of these strategies involve distorted or biased perceptions of the self and social relationships; this concept has been referred to as the “self serving bias” (Brown, 1986; Zuckerman, 1979). The third-person perception is one manifestation of an ego-enhancement strategy. That is, if people assume that they are less likely than others to be affected by certain types of harmful media content, they may be attempting to generate positive feelings about themselves.

Potentially harmful forms of media content have more utility for ego enhancement than do benign media content. When exposure to the content has potentially negative repercussions, an individual’s self esteem can be enhanced by assuming that others will be greatly affected while the self remains unaffected. In other words, the individual feels relatively superior. Individuals with extreme or strongly held opinions on an issue in the media may be better able to utilize that content for ego-enhancement purposes. This notion is based on theoretical constructs of “selective perception,” and the “hostile media phenomenon” (Perloff, 1989; Vallone et al., 1985). According to Perloff (1989), people engage in selective interpretation in an attempt to make sense of, or come to understand, messages in accordance with their previously held beliefs; this makes it highly unlikely that a person will change an opinion on a given topic, despite the potential influence a message has.

In addition, messages mean different things to different people. Hastorf and Cantril (1954) found that participants' perceptions of a football game varied greatly according to the nature of their allegiance to the teams. Each group saw the referee's calls as being biased against the team they supported. Similarly, Vallone et al. (1985) found that perceptions of bias in a news story about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict varied depending on the viewer's allegiances. Specifically, Israeli respondents saw the story as being pro-Palestinian while Palestinians saw the story as being pro-Israeli. Neutral respondents, however, did not perceive the news coverage to be biased either way. Thus, people with extreme viewpoints or strong allegiances to one side of an issue will see the media content as being more biased than are those people without strong allegiances. The tendency to see the media as being biased against one's own opinion has been referred to as the "hostile media phenomenon" (Vallone et al., 1985). Additional studies have continued to show support for the notion of the hostile media phenomenon (Christen, Kannaovakun, & Gunther, 2002; Matheson & Dursun, 2001).

Selective perception and the hostile media phenomenon are linked to the third-person perception. Individuals with allegiances or extreme opinions on an issue are more likely to see media coverage as being biased against the individual's own opinion. When they perceive the content to be biased against their own opinion, they will also be more likely to see that content as having a greater negative effect on its audience. For such individuals, then, the media content has a greater potential for ego-enhancement. In other words, when an individual sees a message that is inconsistent with that individual's opinion, he/she will be likely to think others are more influenced

by the message than he/she is influenced. Further, if people are highly involved and assume others to be neutral to the issue at hand, they will be likely to think others are more affected than the self is affected (Perloff, 1989). Finally, if individuals are highly involved in media content, they will be likely to feel that media sources attempt to influence other people against their point of view (Davison, 1983). This thesis is a study of the third-person phenomenon that takes into account an individual's relationship to the content in question, rather than assuming all respondents have the same orientation toward content that had been designated prosocial or antisocial by the researcher. In doing this, the study fleshes out the relationship between the third-person phenomenon and its theoretical underpinnings in theories of ego-enhancement, selective perception, and the hostile media phenomenon.

The Third-Person Perception

The third-person perception states that people are more likely to feel that media content affects others more than it affects the self. Research on third-person perceptions has covered, but is not limited to, newspaper articles, pornography, public service announcements, advertisements, and political messages (Cohen et al., 1988; Eveland et al., 1999; Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Hwa, 1996; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; McLeod et al., 1997; Morrison et al., 2002; Price et al., 1998; Lo & Wei, 2002). McLeod et al. (1997) examined the use of violent rap lyrics to assess third-person perception; people were more likely to believe that others would be more influenced by the violent lyrics than they themselves would be influenced. Similarly, Gunther

and Hwa (1996) found that people rate television content containing sex, violence, and foul language to be more harmful to others than to themselves.

Gunther (1995) studied the third-person perception and effect in the context of pornographic material. This study claims that pornography is generally accepted to be negative in this society -- it has been accused of leading people toward rape and the degradation of women. Using this generally accepted negative stimuli, this study found that a large number of American adults perceive others to be affected by pornographic media content more than the self is affected (Gunther, 1995). Similarly, Lo and Wei (2002) studied the use of pornography on the Internet in relation to gender and third-person perceptions. The findings of this study showed that females were likely to perceive greater negative effects of this pornography on other males than they perceived on other females.

Third-person perceptions have also been studied in conjunction with the impact of political advertisements and campaigns. For example, Salwen (1998) examined the third-person perception and effect in the context of the 1996 presidential election. Salwen's study examined the effectiveness of various types of media and its perceived impact on the self and others. The findings of this study showed a third-person perception in which people were likely to believe media coverage of the election influenced others more than it influenced the self (Salwen, 1998).

Price et al. (1998) examined the effect of an advertisement published in college newspapers that denied the severity of the Holocaust. This study found that subjects thought other students would be more affected by seeing this advertisement than they were affected by seeing it. Another study that examined the effect of advertisements found that adults were likely to think others were more susceptible to the negative

advertising messages regarding controversial products and gambling services than they themselves were affected. This study found a third-person perception in relation to both susceptibility and severity of the message (Shah, Faber & Youn, 1999).

A study by Gunther (1991) found that when assessing news stories, people tended to exhibit a third-person perception. While participants did not think others were more influenced by a credible source such as the *New York Times*, they did think others would be more affected by content in a tabloid publication such as the *National Enquirer*. Participants thought others, even those in the same social class, would be more likely than the self to believe the stories in the *National Enquirer*. Similarly, in examining libelous news articles, Cohen et al. (1988) found that subjects perceived the impact of defamatory articles to be greater on others than it was on the self.

Salwen and Driscoll (1997) examined the role of the third-person perception pertaining to news coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial in 1995. This study also found a third-person perception; subjects were likely to think others watching the news coverage of the trial would be more affected by the media content than the self would be affected.

The Social Distance Corollary

One goal of third-person research is to explain what phenomenon accounts for third-person differentials. The first explanation for third-person perceptions, introduced by Cohen et al. (1988), was termed the social distance corollary.

According to this corollary, third-person differentials are explained by the amount of social distance between participants and how they define “others.” This concept is based on what is defined as an out-group bias, in which a person will rate a group that differs from one’s own group as less favorable than his or her own group. According

to this premise, people are likely to rate groups of people similar to themselves as being less affected by harmful media content than are groups of people who differ from them (Cohen et al., 1988). The concept of social distance as an explanation for third-person perceptions is rooted in the notion of ego-enhancement. When people rate groups of people who are similar to themselves as being less affected than are groups that differ from them, they may be seeking to make themselves feel better, or reinforce their egos.

The initial social distance study asked participants from Stanford University to assess the effects of libelous news articles on the self, other Stanford students, other Californians, and the public at large. The results of this study showed that among comparison groups, students rated themselves as being least affected by the newspaper articles. In addition, as groups increased in social distance, participants rated those groups as being more affected by the media content (Cohen, et al., 1988). Gunther (1991) replicated the findings of this initial study when he examined the perceived impact of defamatory news articles on the self and others. Again, comparison groups used were the self, others in the same class, other University of Minnesota students, and other Minnesota residents. Findings indicated that as groups became farther from the self in social distance, perceived impact was estimated to be greater (Gunther, 1991).

Brosius and Engel (1996) examined third-person perceptions in relation to commercials and advertisements as well as news and music. The study did find support for the social distance corollary when the definition of comparison groups was extended to include friends, acquaintances, and other people. In addition, Gibbon and Durkin (1995) found support for the social distance corollary in a study that defined

“other” categories to be family, neighbors, other state residents, other members of the same country, and finally, others in general. Again, perceived impact of negative media content was directly correlated with an increase in perceived difference from the participants’ group.

Lo and Wei (2002) found that gender was a category of perceived social distance in their study on third-person perceptions and Internet pornography. This study found that women were more likely to think men were affected by pornographic content than they were to think other women were affected. This finding supports the notion of social distance, in the fact that women would be likely to consider other women to be more similar to them socially than are men.

Most studies pertaining to both social distance and social science research in general, have used college age samples in their research. However, a recent study examined third-person perceptions and explanations of social distance in perceived impact on adolescents (Henriksen & Flora, 1999). This study examined the perceived impact of both cigarette advertisements as well as antismoking advertisements. The results indicated that similar to college sample studies, third-person perceptions can be accounted for by measures of social distance. In this study, participants were asked to rate the impact of advertisements on themselves, their best friends, and other peers.

Results indicate that as “others” grew farther in social distance, so did the size of the third-person differential (Henriksen & Flora, 1999).

There has been some argument among scholars that the social distance corollary cannot entirely account for the notion of third-person perceptions. The argument stands that while the aforementioned research did support the social distance corollary, other research has only found partial support. For example, Cohen and

Davis (1991) found only partial support in a study that examined the third-person effects of negative political advertising. The comparison groups were the self, others, others in the state, others in the region, and others in the United States. Cohen and Davis posit that the lack of support for the social distance corollary may be due to the definition of “others” in this study. It is possible that the definition was not specific enough for participants to judge how others were affected by this type of media content. Further, the researchers state that certain factors contributing to that particular election could have influenced the participants’ reactions to the stimulus (1991).

In addition, McLeod et al. (1997) analyzed the effects of violent and misogynic rap lyrics on University of Delaware students. The study used the comparison groups of other University of Delaware students, other youths in New York and Los Angeles, and the average person. In order to support the social distance corollary, the most affected group would have been the average person. However, the results showed that participants perceived other University of Delaware students and the average person to be affected nearly the same amount, while other youths from New York and Los Angeles were perceived to be affected significantly more than the other groups (McLeod et al., 1997). While these findings seem to contradict the social distance corollary, the failure to find support for the corollary may actually lie in the measurement used by the researchers. The notion of social distance between the groups in this study were assumed by the researchers a priori, rather than actually measured. It may be that participants viewed youths from other parts of the country as the most socially distant from themselves and judged perceived impact on them accordingly (McLeod et al., 1997).

In the argument of the social distance corollary, Eveland et al. (1999) proposed an alternate explanation for third-person differentials, in which the difference in perceived impact is a function of exposure to media content, rather than social distance. The study examined the difference in perceived impact on the self and other groups when presented with violent rap lyrics. When comparison groups were defined in terms of age groups, the findings did not support the social distance corollary.

Rather, third-person differentials could be explained by which age group would be more likely to be exposed to the rap lyrics. These groups were rated as being more affected than other groups. The findings of this study indicate that in the context of rap music, participants evaluate the amount of impact a message has on a person in direct relation to the amount of exposure that the person has to the message (Eveland et al., 1999). While the notion of perceived exposure is a novel and rational explanation for some third-person studies, in this case it does not seem to be the most logical explanation. In the case of violent rap lyrics, it could be argued that people vary greatly in terms of their exposure to this kind of media content. However, it is plausible to say that explanations for third-person perceptions are most likely content specific. For example, perceived exposure might not as accurately account for third-person differentials in this study as people in general are more widely exposed to news coverage than they are to violent rap lyrics.

While some studies have only found partial support for the social distance corollary, and alternative models have been proposed, this thesis will use the social distance corollary as its hypothesized explanation for third-person differentials. The explanation of the social distance corollary is grounded in strong theory, based on the idea of an out-group bias and ego enhancement. Many studies have found support for

the link between social distance and third-person perceptions (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Cohen et al., 1988; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; Gunther, 1991; Henriksen & Flora, 1999; Lo & Wei, 2002). In addition, the studies that found only partial support could be explained by possible flaws in the measurements or design of the study. Future studies should attempt to replicate the findings of Eveland et al. (1999); however, the social distance corollary presents itself to be the most logical explanation for this study.

Prosocial Versus Antisocial Media Effects

In analyzing third-person perceptions, most studies have used stimulus material that is undeniably antisocial in nature. Antisocial messages generally contradict the opinions of most people and are likely to be seen as harmful; therefore, studies of this kind usually evoke a third-person effect (Perloff, 1996). The kind of content found in these studies includes, but is not limited to: libelous newspaper articles, political messages, violent television and music content, and pornography (Cohen et al., 1988; Eveland et al., 1999; Gunther, 1995; McLeod et al., 1997; Salwen, 1998).

However, when content is ambiguous or prosocial, the findings for the third-person perception have been inconclusive (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Driscoll & Salwen, 1997; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Lo & Wei, 2002). Prosocial media content is designed to help society; when this content is used as stimulus material the expectation (according to the self-serving bias) is that people would experience a reverse third-person perception or a “first-person perception” (Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Thorson, 1992). As a form of ego enhancement people would be likely to feel that the self is more affected by the

positive message than are others. It has also been shown that it may be more socially desirable for respondents to think they are more affected by positive messages than are others around them, which may evoke the first-person perception (Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Thorson, 1992).

The significance of the literature pertaining to the first-person perception is minor compared with research pertaining to third-person perceptions. This is because the major contribution of third-person research in general lies in its link to the behavioral component of the phenomenon. Therefore, since the research using prosocial content would most likely not generate this kind of behavioral component, it does not make the same contributions to communication theory and research as do third-person studies.

This study examined prosocial and antisocial content in a way that is unique to the field of communication research. Most previous studies have manipulated the stimulus material a priori. That is, they deem the media content to be either definitely antisocial or definitely prosocial (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Salwen & Driscoll, 1997). These studies have assumed the positive or negative nature of the content before they administered the content to participants. However, it can be argued that in some cases, what one respondent deems to be negative may be perceived by others to provide positive or healthy benefits.

For example, Salwen and Driscoll (1997) examined the news coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial. Third-person perceptions were much larger when the message was perceived to be antisocial as compared with messages that were seen as being prosocial. Similarly, Gunther and Mundy (1993) found that when they provided

respondents with both harmful and beneficial media messages, the third-person perception was much larger when the stimulus was perceived to be harmful than when it was seen as being prosocial.

This particular study actually measured the direction of the perceived impact rather than assuming it in advance. It did this by using abortion protest stories as content referent material. The study used both pro life and pro choice stimulus stories, and used positive and negative versions of each side of the issue. The novelty of this study lies in the fact that respondents had varying attitudes on this issue. In addition, the study measured individual differences in respondents' attitudes, rather than assuming they would all respond to the stimulus material in the same way, as previous studies have done.

Hostile Media Phenomenon

Incorporated in the literature pertaining to the third-person perception and effect is the variable of the media's treatment of the subject matter. Media sources can often act as gatekeepers of information. They allow the public access to certain information and restrict access to other media content. In addition to this power, the media also have the ability to frame news stories and media content in ways that allow the public to see the news story from a specific perspective. This ability allows media sources to portray certain subjects in a negative or positive light (Iyengar, 1991).

The hostile media phenomenon occurs when people feel that media coverage of an event is biased against the side they support. Many studies have shown that when two groups of people oppose each other in their viewpoints, both sides will be likely to think the media is portraying their own side negatively. These parties are

likely to think the media coverage will persuade neutral viewers against their side of the issue (Gunther, 1991; Perloff, 1989; Vallone et al., 1985).

Vallone et al. (1985) examined perceptions of news stories pertaining to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. The results of this study showed that the story was perceived quite differently depending on which side of the issue the respondents' favored. Respondents of each side were likely to think the story was biased against their own point of view. Israeli respondents saw the story as being pro-Palestinian and the Palestinians saw the story as being pro-Israeli. Neutral respondents did not perceive the news coverage to be biased either way. The difference between the partial and neutral respondents showed that individuals who are very loyal to one side of the issue will be more likely than are neutral respondents to see the content as being biased against their point of view. The findings of Vallone et al. (1985) have been replicated with the same findings (Christen et al., 2002; Matheson & Dursun, 2001; Perloff, 1989).

It has also been shown that perceived hostile intent toward the subject of the story will intensify the estimated effect on others when compared with the estimated effect on the self (Cohen et al., 1988). For example, Cohen et al. (1988) found that when examining the impact of libelous articles, if subjects thought the reporter had intended harm toward the person in the article, they were likely to think that others were more affected than if the subject of the story was not intentionally treated hostilely.

The notion of a hostile media environment is linked to Sherif's social judgment theory (1965). Sherif's theory states that people have what is termed a latitude of acceptance, a latitude of rejection, and a latitude of noncommitment. According to

this theory, when people encounter ideas that fall within their latitude of rejection, they actually perceive those ideas to be much more different from their own ideas than they actually are. In addition, if ideas fall into their latitude of acceptance, they perceive those ideas to much more similar to their own ideas than they truly are (Sherif, 1965). This “contrast effect” of accentuating the difference of information in the latitude of rejection may help to explain the hostile media effect. When individuals see news coverage on an issue about which they feel strongly, they tend to develop exaggerated perceptions of the perceived bias of the coverage. According to Perloff (1989), when people are more ego-involved, they will be more likely to think the media coverage contradicts their point of view. In addition, when people tend to think media coverage is biased against their viewpoint, they will be more likely to think others are susceptible to the media message.

This research project will measure the effect of the hostile media environment by assessing reactions to its stimulus material, which will be created from abortion protest stories. This issue has parties both for and against either side of the issue, which provides a forum in which the hostile media phenomenon can be measured. In either case, each respondent could perceive the story to be biased against his/her point of view.

In addition, respondents may actually perceive the story to be more negative than it actually is when it falls within their latitude of rejection. Therefore, respondents could see the story as being more antisocial than it truly is. In this particular study, respondents’ orientations on the abortion issue may affect their perceptions of the news story stimulus. Participants may think the media is already giving too much coverage to the position with which they disagree; in addition, they

may think the media should not cover the opposing position because it could generate too much support for that side. Finally, they may be likely to think that the coverage of their own side is biased against them, and that the media portray their point of view as being deviant, and therefore antisocial.

The estimation of social desirability can be seen as a function of respondents' position on abortion. It is expected that for a given news story, respondents will perceive the position that is opposite to their own to be negative/antisocial. In addition, the more extreme the respondents are in their beliefs, the more likely they will be to see it as socially undesirable. Respondents who's viewpoints fall within the latitude of noncommitment, will be more likely to see the story as less antisocial than are those who hold very strong beliefs.

The predictions for social desirability will be mirrored by the third-person perceptions. Respondents who are extreme in their viewpoints will be likely to see the news coverage of the opposing side as being antisocial. Therefore, they will also be more likely to think others are more affected than they themselves are affected; they will experience bigger third-person differentials than will respondents who are less extreme in their viewpoints. This will be compounded by the fact that the respondents with very strong beliefs may realize they are extreme in their thinking, and will be less likely to change their minds regarding the issue. Therefore, extreme respondents will be more likely than less extreme people to think they cannot be affected by opposing content regarding the issue. This would also increase the third-person differential between the self and others.

Understanding the Nature of Media Effects Judgments

Many third-person studies have debated whether people are able to make accurate judgments about how much the self is affected and how much others are affected. The research has shown that in general respondents tend to overestimate the effects of media content on others (Cohen et al., 1988; Gunther, 1991; Gunther & Thorson, 1992; Price et al., 1996). The literature, however, is inconclusive as to whether people accurately estimate effects of media content on the self. While some studies have found underestimated effects (Cohen et al., 1988), others have found accurately estimated effects (Gunther, 1991), and still others have found overestimated effects of media content on the self (Gunther & Thorson, 1992).

McLeod, Detenber, and Eveland (2000) examined the ways people assess the nature of media effects on others and what kind of link these effects have to censorship. McLeod et al. (2000) posit that paternalism is the driving factor behind the third-person perception and the way people judge effects on the self and others.

According to the concept of paternalism, people are likely to think others are incapable of recognizing harmful media content as being detrimental to society.

Therefore, they are also likely to feel the need to protect others around them from the potential harm of such media messages. This feeling of paternalism is what drives the desire to censor potentially harmful media content (McLeod et al., 2000).

The results of this study show that the way people perceive the impact of messages on the self and the impact of messages on others is made very differently.

The study incorporated four variables, degree of perceived exposure, degree of common sense, the extent to which respondents felt the content was antisocial in nature, and the degree of the respondents' paternalistic attitudes. In assessing the degree of perceived exposure, respondents felt there was no connection to the impact

on the self. However, they were likely to think the degree of exposure was related to the impact on others. This finding supports the proposition by Eveland et al. (1999) that the third-person differential is related to the amount of perceived exposure to media content. When estimating the effects of media content on others, respondents tend to assume the magic bullet theory of communication (e.g., DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989) in which people simply absorb media content without the ability to filter out negative effects (McLeod et al., 2000).

Evidence of the magic bullet theory can also be found with the second variable, common sense. Findings of the study showed that respondents were likely to think that others' common sense could not negate the negative effects of media content; however, one's own common sense was seen as being powerful enough to allow the person to be less affected by the message. The third variable, the extent to which the message was antisocial in nature, had the same effect as the first two variables. The more antisocial the message was, the more likely respondents were to think others would be affected by it. However, when judging effects on the self, respondents were likely to think they would be less affected as the message became increasingly antisocial. The final variable, paternalistic attitudes, accounted for the greater impact that respondents thought the message had on others, but had no effect on the perceived impact on the self (McLeod et al., 2000).

Overall, these findings support a direct effects model for the perceived impact on others. More specifically, respondents were likely to assume a magic bullet theory of impact when estimating the impact of media content on others. Others were seen as being affected by the content regardless of intervening variables. So, the more perceived exposure to antisocial messages, the more likely "others" would be to be

affected by the content, regardless of their own common sense. However, when estimating the effects on the self, the model is much more complex. Respondents factored in common sense when estimating the effect on the self (McLeod et al., 2000).

To more clearly understand how people perceive the impact of messages on the self and others, it is necessary to understand Sillars's attribution theory (1982).

This theory states that people manage an immense amount of information in the world by grouping or clustering information together in their minds. People tend to attribute information based on personality or environmental factors, which are referred to as internal and external factors respectively. Gunther (1991) states that in judging the impact of messages on the self and others, people will underestimate the impact of external factors on others. More specifically, others will be perceived as not being able to respond to or recognize situational factors, and will therefore be more susceptible to certain messages than the self is.

As stated by Eveland et al. (1999), if people are assessing effective power of a message in terms of likelihood of exposure, they are at least partially accepting the magic bullet theory of mass communication (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). By attributing the effect of a message on a person or group of people to the amount of perceived exposure, people are acting as naive scientists. They are not rational and objective in their thought processes, but rather, they engage in a fundamental attribution error (Sillars, 1982). This attribution error not only helps to interpret the third-person differential, but it may also account for the link between the third-person perception and the third-person effect (desire for censorship). For example, the amount to which a person attributes impact to exposure may be directly related to the

extent to which that person desires the restriction of media content (Eveland et al., 1999).

The Third-Person Effect (Behavioral Consequences)

The behavioral component of the third-person effect is manifested in the desire to balance negative effects of media content in some way, such as censorship or changing public policies (Davison, 1983). McLeod et al. (1997) proposed that these desires are a result of some type of paternalism in our society. Paternalism refers to the idea that people are not able to self-censor violent or harmful media content – it assumes that people are helpless individuals, and therefore, cannot control influences of messages. The person who feels the need to censor information will be likely to think he/she is smarter than are “others,” or at the very least, smart enough to avoid being affected by harmful media content. Paternalism may also be connected to a self-serving bias, in which people feel a need to see themselves favorably when compared with others. The desire to censor is related to the perceived difference between the effect on the self and the effect on others, known as the third-person differential (McLeod et al., 1997).

The links to censorship have shown support for restrictions on certain forms of media content that are deemed harmful to others. Some of these contexts have pertained to violent rap lyrics, violence on television, pornography, and campaign messages (Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Hwa, 1996; Lo & Wei, 2002; McLeod et al., 1997; Salwen, 1998; Shah et al., 1999). However, the desire for censorship may extend to other areas. This particular study analyzed the extent to which the third-person perception is related to respondents’ perceptions of a protest story’s newsworthiness. If a third-person effect is found, respondents may feel a desire to

suppress the expressive rights of the protesters in question. In addition, they may believe the story to be less worthy of coverage because they disagree with the protesters or feel that the content has negative consequences for “other” viewers.

Because of the hostile media phenomenon, the respondent may be likely to feel that a protest covering the opposing side of the issue is not worthy of the amount of news coverage it has received (Vallone et al., 1998). In short, the amount of the third-person perception may account for the extent to which respondents feel the story is newsworthy. This could lead them to desire restrictions on the expressive rights of protesters, which would violate a constitutional right of this country.

Behavior Consequences – Support for Censorship

Support for the third-person effect (behavioral component) has been found, although it is minor compared with the amount of support for the third-person perception. Many studies that have found a third-person perception have been unable to find any behavioral consequences. In addition, explanations for the behavioral component contend with one and other in the literature across the field. Some scholars have posited that the behavioral component can be explained by the total amount of impact subjects think media content has on others. However, others think the tendency toward censorship can be explained more clearly through the third-person differential – the amount of perceived difference between the impact on the self and the impact on others (McLeod et al., 1997).

In his research on pornographic media content, Gunther (1995) found that people were likely to favor restricting such graphic content. In addition, subjects’ desire to censor was linked to the extent to which they felt others were affected by the pornography. This may have some consequences for public policy, especially if

people overestimate the extent to which others are affected by pornography – it may raise the desire to change restrictions on such material (Gunther, 1995). Similar findings by Lo and Wei (2002) showed that in examining Internet pornography, female subjects perceived men to be more affected by the pornography than were other women in the study. This difference in perception was a strong predictor for the desire to censor such content.

Another context in which behavioral consequences have arisen is television violence. Gunther and Hwa (1996) found that Singaporeans were heavily in favor of censoring harmful television content. Although Singapore's government has a high level of censorship currently, subjects were in favor of even higher levels of censorship than those that already exist. In addition, Salwen and Dupagne (1999) found that third-person perceptions were present in the context of television violence as were third-person effects. The study showed that when participants thought others were more affected by the media content they were affected, they were likely to think that content should be restricted. Further, predictors of support for censorship included self reported knowledge of television violence and televised trials. In addition, the education levels of participants were negative predictors of support for censorship – as participants increased in education level, the desire to censor violent content decreased. Salwen and Dupagne propose that this finding indicates that people can be taught to respect and promote the right to freedom of expression (1999).

Another study on support for censorship of television violence examined third-person effects in relation to aggressive behaviors and a mean world perception, or an increasing fear of the world as a result of heavy television viewing. The results of this study showed that perceived future aggressive behaviors were significantly correlated

to a desire to censor or restrict violent media content. Mean world perceptions, on the other hand, were not significant predictors of support for censorship. In this study, women, older participants, and more religious participants were more likely to support restricting this type of media content than were others (Hoffner et al., 1999).

Third-person effects have also been found in conjunction with news coverage of political campaigns. For example, Salwen (1998) examined media coverage during the 1996 presidential election. The findings of this study show that, along with significant third-person perceptions, participants were likely to support restrictions on campaign messages.

In examining the use of product advertisement, Shah et al. (1999) also found a third-person effect. Participants who exhibited a third-person perception were likely to support restrictions on certain product advertisements. The desire to censor content was linked to the differential between the amount of perceived impact of advertising on others versus the amount of perceived impact of advertising on the self. The third-person effect was also linked to a “generalized risk perception,” in which people estimate that both they and others are susceptible to and severely affected by certain media messages (Shah et al., 1999, p. 258).

McLeod et al. (1997) found that people who experienced a third-person perception pertaining to violent rap lyrics were also likely to experience a desire to censor those lyrics. This study proposes that it is the perceived difference between the effect on the self and others, the third-person differential, that accounts for the behavioral component of the third-person effect.

Not all third-person effects studies, however, have found the behavioral component of the third-person effect. For example, Salwen and Driscoll (1997)

examined the third-person effect and news coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial in 1995. This study did find the third-person perception; however, the study did not find a connection between the third-person perception and the effect. More specifically, the extent to which a person exhibited a third-person perception could not account for the desire to censor media content. Similarly, Gunther (1991) was unable to find a connection between the third-person perception and effect when examining defamatory newspaper articles. Gunther's findings showed that the third-person perception could not be a predictor for the desire to restrict or prohibit such newspaper articles from being printed.

Protest Research

Previous research on protest has shown that the media have the power to frame stories in a way that allows the public to see news content from a particular perspective or point of view. This framing can have some negative implications for protesters in the media. With the aid of certain types of media strategies, protesters have often been shown to be deviant and destructive in their efforts to get their messages across. This type of framing can affect the way the public views the protesters and the amount of public support for the protesters' cause (Iyengar, 1991; McLeod, 1995; McLeod & Detenber, 1999). Because protest is a valuable part of society, framing may threaten the free marketplace of ideas in this country by supporting the status quo and deeming anything outside that status quo as deviant and harmful.

The news frame refers to the tendency to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more significant than other aspects of that same reality. More specifically, framing is a way of packaging information so the audience will see a

story from a particular perspective. Framing is facilitated by the numbers of people within media organizations who act as gatekeepers of information (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

The framing of news stories has been studied within many contexts. Initial studies by Iyengar (1991) examined the differences between thematic framing and episodic framing. These studies pertained to social issues including poverty, terrorism, and crime in the United States. Stories that are framed episodically tend to focus on the issue pertaining to one specific instance or individual. Data have shown that stories framed in this way cause audience members to place blame on the individual for the sequence of events. Stories that are framed thematically, on the other hand, tend to focus more on the result of economic conditions that contribute to a specific issue. Stories framed thematically tend to cause the audience to blame society at large for a specific situation or problem (Iyengar, 1991).

Iyengar's research states that between the years of 1981 and 1986, 1100 news reports on crime and more than 2000 reports on terrorism were aired on the three major news networks: ABC, CBS, NBC. Nearly all of the news stories were framed episodically – they each focused on an individual instance of crime or terrorism (Iyengar, 1991). Other framing studies have shown that framing can affect the extent to which people find stories newsworthy, and the way the audience estimates the climate of public opinion surrounding an issue (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

The concept of framing has also been studied in conjunction with the role of social protest groups in the media. McLeod and Detenber (1999) found that the way a news story about protest is framed does affect the way audience members view both the protest itself and the protesters involved. Many stories in the media that cover

protesters do not provide a fair and adequate representation of both sides of the event.

Audience members who see stories that are virtually one-sided tend to be more critical of the protesters than are those who see balanced stories with fair coverage of both sides. McLeod and Detenber (1999) posit that unbalanced media coverage actually reinforces the status quo by thematic framing, in which they place blame on the individual or group of protesters. As a result of biased coverage, rather than promoting the right to expression and diversity in society, the media actually view any deviation from the status quo as a threat to the environment. Media sources tend to cover stories from the perspective of the status quo, which legitimizes the viewpoint of people in power and minimizes the legitimacy of any viewpoint that deviates from the status quo (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

Research by Husting (1999) supported these claims. Husting studied media coverage of protest in relation to the Gulf War and the 1991 war on abortion. This article posits that in a time of national turmoil, such as the Gulf War, the media tended to ignore much of the anti-war protesting, in exchange for promoting support for the troops going to war. Similarly, in the case of abortion protest, the media portrayed protesters in a way that made activism seem detrimental to American society. In both cases, the media marginalized the protesters and created an imaginary sense of what the American public was feeling. In essence, they made women and protesters seem unreasonable and irrational in their attempts to voice their opinions (Husting, 1999).

The process of framing can have negative implications for members of society. Framing tends to focus on how audience members construct meaning from daily life experiences, including exposure to media messages. In the event that these are not fair or accurate representations, framing may motivate audience members to view a certain

group of people or issue in a specific way. The framed effect or viewpoint is not necessarily that which audience members would construct for themselves if they had access to all the available information on the issue. In addition, framing threatens the free marketplace of ideas, because social groups often reach the public with their messages through mass media coverage. Their access to the marketplace of ideas is dependent upon media organizations' willingness and motivation to cover social issues events fairly. Therefore, the framing of protest news stories marginalizes radical protest groups in a way that restricts their ability to communicate their viewpoints through the media (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

This study used four abortion protest stories as content referent material. For the stimulus material regarding either side of the issue, there were two versions of each protest. While both stories of either side contained much of the same material, the two versions were framed quite differently. One version of the story framed the protest as being much more critical toward the protesters than did the other story. This study proposed that the two versions of either side of the abortion issue would have different effects on the respondents, depending on which version they see and their position on abortion. In addition, the study measured the respondents' attitudes toward protest in general to control for the interaction of the attitude toward protest and the respondents' position on abortion.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

News stories about abortion protests were used as stimulus stories. The stimulus material consisted of protests conducted by both pro choice and pro life protest groups. This protest topic was chosen because it is a salient issue to which most people have given considerable thought and on which they have developed

strong opinions. Members of the public are relatively decided on this issue (Gallup Organization 2000). This study examined the role of the third-person phenomenon in relation to those who view each protest in question as negative or positive. The study also explored whether the third-person phenomenon can be found within the context of news coverage of social protest.

RQ1: Can a third person perception be detected when subjects are exposed to news media's coverage of social protest?

There is a robust amount of support for the third-person perception. This support has generally been found when the content referent material is seen to be antisocial in nature and therefore, harmful to people in society. Support for the third-person perception has been seen in contexts including, but not limited to, violence on television, violent rap lyrics, campaign messages, and pornography (Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Hwa, 1996; Hoffner et al., 1999; Lo & Wei, 2002; McLeod et al., 1997; Salwen, 1998; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999). When respondents see a story that portrays the opposite side of the issue from their own belief, they will be likely to think the story is antisocial. In addition, news media often frames protest groups as being more antisocial than they truly are (McLeod, 1995). Together, these variables make it highly likely that media content pertaining to abortion protest would evoke a third-person perception.

H1: When a message of a social protest group is perceived to be negative, it will be linked to greater third-person perceptions than when the message of a protest group is perceived as positive.

Literature that examines prosocial message and the third-person perception has been inconclusive in its findings. When content referent material was seen as

being prosocial in nature, studies have found first-person perceptions, third-person perceptions, or no difference between the perceived impact on the self and others (Eveland & McLeod, 1999). This study used content referent material that was perceived by some respondents to be prosocial, depending on the respondent's position on the abortion issue. Because this study used content that is viewed by some as being antisocial and by others as being prosocial, it provides an opportunity to examine the existence of a first-person perception. This study explored whether subjects who see the story as positive will exhibit a traditional third-person perception, a first-person perception, or no difference at all.

RQ2: Can a first-person perception be detected when news stories are perceived to be positive?

The third-person differential has been explained throughout much of the third-person literature through the social distance corollary (Cohen et al., 1988). This corollary states that as the social distance between the self and the general "other" increases, so does that amount of difference between the perceived impact on the self and the perceived impact on others (Cohen et al., 1988). A contending explanation posits that the third-person differential can be better explained as a function of perceived exposure to media content (Eveland et al., 1999). This study attempted to examine whether social distance can truly account for the amount of difference between the perceived impact of media content on the self and others.

H2: Third-person differentials will be directly related to perceived social distance between participants and other groups.

Based on previous findings regarding the hostile media phenomenon, given an issue with two opposing sides, respondents on either side will see the story as being biased against their point of view. Vallone et al. (1985) first conducted this research in an examination of a news story pertaining to Palestinians and Israelis. The findings of this study show that parties on both sides of the issue felt that the story was biased against their side. These findings have been replicated by various other scholars in the field of communication (Christen et al., 2002; Matheson & Dursun, 2001; Perloff, 1989). In addition, parties who see the media coverage as being biased will be likely to think that the media is attempting to sway neutral viewers to the opposite side of the issue (Gunther, 1991; Perloff, 1989; Vallone et al., 1985).

In conjunction with the hostile media phenomenon is the issue of ego-involvement with the media content. According to Perloff (1989), the more highly involved a person is with the media content, the more likely they will be to think the media is contradicting their viewpoint. Therefore, the more extreme a person is in their beliefs, the more likely he/she will be to see the content as being antisocial or negative. This distorted viewpoint also has the ability to inflate the third-person differential. More extreme attitudes may cause participants to believe others to be more susceptible to messages participants deem to be antisocial.

H3a: Attitude extremity will be directly related to perceptions of news story bias.

H3b: Perception of news story bias will be directly related to perceptions that the news story is negative or antisocial.

H3c: Attitude extremity will be directly related to perceptions that the news story is negative or antisocial.

H4a: Third-person differentials will be directly related to perceptions that the news story is negative or antisocial.

H4b: Attitude extremity will be directly related to the third-person differential.

The third-person perception has often been linked with the desire to censor material that is seen as highly affective to others, but not to the self. This portion of the third-person effect is the behavioral component (Davison, 1983). This study tested whether the behavioral component was found in relation to protest stories that were viewed as being negative. However, it did not measure the traditional desire for censorship, since it is unlikely that respondents would want to censor media coverage or content. Rather, the study expanded the behavioral component to look at support for the expressive rights of protesters and the degree to which respondents find a specific protest to be newsworthy. Based on previous literature, it is likely that when the message is seen as antisocial and there is a large third-person differential, respondents would be likely to show less support for protesters' expressive rights.

This can be explained by the various literature on paternalism – when respondents see others as being heavily affected by media content, they will also think those others are less capable of protecting themselves from such content. Therefore, the desire to restrict expressive rights of protesters may be seen as an attempt to protect others from media content against which they are seen as defenseless.

A lack of support for expressive rights could also affect the respondents' perceived validity of the protest's media coverage. It is likely that the larger the third-person differential becomes, the less likely the respondents will be to think the protest

is worthy of news coverage. They may be likely to think the particular side of the issue has been given too much attention and is not worthy of such news coverage.

H5a: The size of the third-person differential will be directly related to criticism of the protest group in the news story.

H5b: The size of the third-person differential will be inversely related to participants' identification with the protest group in the news story.

H6: The size of the third-person differential will be inversely related to support for the protesters expressive rights.

H7: The size of the third-person differential will be inversely related to the participants' perceptions of the protest story's newsworthiness.

These hypotheses were tested in this study.

Chapter 3

METHODS

This study used an experimental design to examine third-person effects of media framing techniques on viewers. This study used a 2x2x2 factorial design. The factors consisted of the subjects' attitude toward the abortion issue (pro life or pro choice), the nature of the protest in the story (pro life or pro choice protest), and the treatment of the protesters in the news story (negative or neutral).

Pretest

Because participants' attitudes toward abortion were one of the factors in the design, prior to the implementation of the study, I conducted a pretest to assess the variance in students' attitudes on the abortion issue. In the pretest, I used questions from an earlier Gallup Poll (Gallup Organization, 2000). The results of the pretest showed that among undergraduate communication students overall, there was a variance in their stance on abortion. However, the variance in the student sample was not completely representative of the variance in the population, as reported by the 2000 Gallup Poll (Gallup Organization, 2000). The pretest results are summarized in Table 1. Data showed that 65% of students labeled themselves pro choice, compared to 48% of the population as a whole; 35% of the student population labeled themselves pro life, compared with 43% of the population as a whole. The national population clearly has a greater variance in attitudes, which may be a limiting factor

when attempting to generalize the results of this study to a general population as a whole.

Several other pretest questions asked students to evaluate the legality of abortion under specific circumstances. Of the students, 22.5% reported that abortion should be legal under any circumstances, 67.5% thought abortion should be legal only under certain circumstances, and 10% thought abortion should be illegal in all circumstances. Once again, the students' attitudes differed somewhat from those of the Gallup sample, which was 29%, 51%, and 19%, respectively.

The following seven questions asked participants to consider specific scenarios and assess whether abortion should be legal in that specific situation. Overall, students were less certain than the population as a whole about the legality of abortion in these situations; rather than stating that abortion should be legal or illegal, students were more likely to answer "depends." Results are summarized in Table 1.

While results showed some variance in attitudes, they also revealed that although 65% of participants characterized themselves as pro choice, they actually tended to report some more conservative answers than did the overall population surveyed by Gallup. The pretest did show, however, that there was sufficient variance in attitudes among the participant pool to have adequate numbers of students in the pro life and pro choice factor.

Table 1 Attitudes on Abortion: University of Delaware students compared with Gallup National Poll.

Attitudes on Abortion: University of Delaware students compared with Gallup National Poll						
Should abortion be legal when:						
	Should be legal		Should be illegal		Depends	
	Gallup	UD	Gallup	UD	Gallup	UD
Woman's life endangered	84.0%	85.0%	12.0%	2.5%	2.0%	12.5%
Woman's physical health endangered	81.0%	70.0%	15.0%	7.5%	2.0%	22.5%
Woman's mental health endangered	64.0%	50.0%	29.0%	12.5%	3.0%	33.0%
Baby's physical health endangered	53.0%	25.0%	39.0%	30.0%	5.0%	45.0%
Baby's mental health endangered	53.0%	27.5%	40.0%	32.5%	4.0%	40.0%
Victim of rape/incest	78.0%	82.1%	19.0%	5.0%	1.0%	12.8%
Family cannot afford child	34.0%	27.5%	62.0%	52.5%	2.0%	17.5%

Procedure

Data were collected in the Department of Communication research laboratory. Students arrived at the lab and were given a chair, clipboard, and pencil. After the completion of informed consent, participants were instructed to watch a two-minute video of one of four constructed news stories featuring either a pro life or a pro choice protest. After viewing the video, participants completed a six-page survey that

assessed their reactions to the video. Sections of the questionnaire focused on participants' attitudes toward protests in general, the specific protest they viewed, perception of the media's treatment of the protesters, and the news story's impact on them in relation to others. In addition, the questionnaire asked some general demographic information and assessed attitudes toward abortion, using the 1996 National Opinion Research Center poll questions (Davis & Smith, 1986). Upon completion of the surveys, the participants were debriefed before leaving the laboratory. The entire procedure took approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Audience Demographic Analysis

This sample consisted of ($N = 268$) undergraduate students from the University of Delaware. Students were recruited from two introductory communication courses, and were given extra credit in return for their participation in the study. The sample was unequal in gender representation, with 73.9% of participants being female and 26.1% of the sample being male. The majority of students in the study were sophomores (51.5%), while freshmen comprised 32.5% , juniors were 10.4% of the sample, and 5.6% were seniors. The range of age was 18 to 25, with 88.3% falling between 18 and 20 years of age, and 11.6% of participants falling between 21 and 25 years of age ($M = 19.44$, $SD = 1.09$).

The questionnaire also measured political interest about both economic and social issues. Results showed that overall, students classified themselves as being primarily liberal; 53.8% were either lean or strong democrats, while 25.9% were lean or strong republicans, and 18% were independent. In regards to economic issues, 51.9% were very liberal, liberal, or somewhat liberal, 21.6% were neutral, and 25.5% classified themselves as being either somewhat conservative or conservative. On

social issues, 67.5% were either very liberal, liberal, or somewhat liberal, 17.5% were independent, and 15% were either somewhat conservative or conservative.

Because attitudes toward protest in general can affect people's responses to news stories about protest, I used four items from McLeod's (1995) research on protest. Participants indicated their agreement (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree) with these items. Average attitudes toward protest ranged from 1.25 - 5.00 ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.67$, $\alpha = .77$).

Finally, the questionnaire assessed pre-existing attitudes toward abortion. Overall, 65.1% of participants classified themselves as being pro choice, while 34.9% considered themselves to be pro life.

Stimulus

This study used four news stories that were constructed in the fall of 1998, using an AVID MC Express non-linear editing system in the Department of Communication at the University of Delaware. The news stories were constructed from actual news footage obtained from WHYI television station in Wilmington and ABC newscasts from the Vanderbilt news archives. After the videos were constructed, a voice track was added, featuring the voice of Steve Kramarck, a professional radio announcer and station manager at WKHS radio station in Wharton, MD.

This study used two different pro life and two different pro choice protest news stories. For each side of the abortion issue, one news story treated the protest critically, and one news story treated the protest neutrally. The video footage in the neutral and the critical versions of each story was very similar – the difference in the two was that the neutral versions used more audio and video clips of bystanders and

protest participants. Audio tracks were constructed and edited into the video footage of each news story to convey the major differences between the two versions. These differences, while subtle, present the protesters quite differently, depending on which video is seen. In the more critical versions, loaded words are used to describe the protesters rather than the more passive words that are used in the neutral versions. In addition, the critical versions insinuated that the general public disagrees with the protesters, while the more neutral versions convey that the public shows some support for the message of the protesters in the news story. The four news story scripts are presented in Appendix A.

To ensure that the four news stories did in fact represent critical and neutral treatment of the two protests, two separate pretests were conducted in 1999 and 2000. Undergraduate students in two communication classes at the University of Delaware watched the four different news stories and rated each story on how they felt the news stories treated the protesters in terms of criticism, sympathy, support, and hostility. Paired sample *t*-tests showed significant differences in the expected direction between critical and neutral new stories for both pro life and pro choice conditions. A summary of these results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Perceived Differences of News Stories

Perceived differences of news stories								
	Pro choice positive	Pro choice negative			Pro life positive	Pro life negative		
	Mean	Mean	<i>t</i>	df	Mean	Mean	<i>t</i>	df
Critical of protesters	2.59	6.27	9.85	63	3.25	6.40	9.69	64
Sympathy for protesters	6.30	3.00	8.07	63	5.98	3.13	7.92	63
Hostile to protesters	2.42	5.88	8.34	63	2.94	5.80	8.02	64
Supportive of protesters	6.44	3.13	7.69	63	6.28	3.29	7.80	64
Note. All <i>t</i> significant at $p < .001$								

Instrumentation

Third-person perception

The third-person perception refers to the tendency for people to feel that salient media content will affect others more than it affects them (Davison, 1983). I used three measures to assess third-person perceptions, based on the concept of social distance. According to the social distance corollary and its supporting research, participants are likely to think that those farther away in social distance will be more likely to be affected than those who are similar to the participants (Cohen et al., 1988).

Based on this, participants indicated on a nine-point scale how much they think they themselves are affected by the news story they have just seen (see Question 66, Appendix B). Second, participants reported how much they believed other participants

in the study were affected by the news story (see Question 68, Appendix B). Finally, participants stated how much they believed the average American in society to be affected by the news story (see Question 70, Appendix B). In addition, for each category of social distance, participants indicated whether they felt they and others had been influenced for or against the protesters in the news story (see Questions 67, 69, and 71, Appendix B). These items were adapted from prior third-person research (Cohen et al., 1988).

From these three measures, I used two measures to assess third-person differentials. The first measure was based on the difference between the perceived impact on other participants in the study versus the perceived impact on the self. For reasons of convenience, the measure was labeled Third Person Effect - Students. The second was the difference between perceived impact on the average American versus the perceived impact on the self, which was referred to as Third Person Effect – Average American.

Attitudes toward abortion

Measures used to assess participants' attitudes toward abortion were adapted from the 1996 NORC poll (Davis & Smith, 1986). Participants indicated on a nine-point scale how strongly they felt and how much knowledge they felt they possessed about the abortion issue (see Questions 2 and 3, Appendix B). Similar to the pretest, the questionnaire asked participants to mark their agreement with nine situations that indicated how much they agreed with whether women should or should not have the right to abortion in that specific situation. Response options ranged from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Scores to these items were averaged to create a measure of attitudes toward abortion ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.91$, $\alpha = .91$). Then, I used a

median split to separate participants into pro life or pro choice categories. Of the scores on the average abortion scales, those 51.1% that were equal to or greater than 3.43 were categorized as pro life ($N = 137$). The remaining 48.9% of participants were categorized as pro choice ($N = 131$).

Perceptions of the news story

Several hypotheses predicted that the third-person perception would be reflected in different observations about the news story. To test these hypotheses, participants completed several items that assessed perceptions of how fairly the news story treated the protesters. In addition, participants also reported the amount of newsworthiness they believed the protest story they viewed to have (see Questions 51-56, Appendix B).

Protest Items

Several hypotheses predicted that the third-person differential would be reflected in participants' attitudes toward protesters in general. First, participants indicated how much they identified with the protesters (see Questions 38, 40, 58, and 60, Appendix B). Responses to these four items were averaged to create a measure of protester identification ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .93$, $\alpha = .84$). In addition, participants indicated the extent to which they were in favor of protesters' expressive rights in society (see Questions 42, 48, 49, and 50, Appendix B) ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.53$, $\alpha = .71$). These items were drawn from prior protest research by McLeod (1995) and McLeod and Detenber (1999).

Statistical Analyses

After scale construction and reliability analyses, several steps were taken to test this study's hypotheses. First *t*-tests were used to see whether exposure to news stories could lead to significant third-person perceptions. Then, a two-factor (news story versus stance on abortion) univariate analysis of variance was used to assess whether third-person effects would be larger when the news story was perceived as negative. Because gender and attitudes about protest can be expected to have an influence on reactions to news stories (McLeod, 1995; Gallup Organization, 2000), these were used as covariates in the analysis. The second hypothesis, based on the social distance corollary, which predicted that third-person differentials would be greater for groups more socially distant from the participants, was tested using *t*-tests. The remaining hypotheses of this study were tested with Pearson correlation coefficients.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

This experiment examined third-person effects in the context of news coverage of social protest. The results of this study reported the tests of these two research questions and these seven hypotheses:

RQ1: Can a third-person perception be detected when subjects are exposed to news media's coverage of social protest?

H1: When a message of a social protest group is perceived to be negative, it will be linked to greater third-person perceptions than when the message of a protest group is perceived as positive.

RQ2: Can a first-person perception be detected when news stories are perceived to be positive?

H2: Third-person differentials will be directly related to perceived social distance between participants and other groups.

H3a: Attitude extremity will be directly related to perceptions of news story bias.

H3b: Perceptions of news story bias will be directly related to perceptions that the news story is negative or antisocial.

H3c: Attitude extremity will be directly related to perceptions that the news story is negative or antisocial.

H4a: Third-person differentials will be directly related to perceptions that the news story is negative or antisocial.

- H4b: Attitude extremity will be directly related to third-person differentials.**
- H5a: The size of the third-person differential will be directly related to criticism of the protest group in the news story.**
- H5b: The size of the third-person differential will be inversely related to participants' identification with the protest group in the news story.**
- H6: The size of the third-person differential will be inversely related to support for protesters' expressive rights.**
- H7: The size of the third-person differential will be inversely related to participants' perceptions of the protest story's newsworthiness.**

Research Question 1

The initial research question of this thesis attempted to decipher whether a third-person perception could be detected in a study that used a news story as the content referent material. Because this stimulus is not quite as clearly harmful as those used in previous studies, it was unclear whether this type of media content would evoke a third-person perception at all. Overall third-person effects were significantly different from zero: TPE-Average American ($M = 1.26$), $t(266) = 10.06$, $p < .001$, and for TPE-Students in this study ($M = .63$), $t(266) = 5.34$, $p < .001$. In addition, there were significant third-person perceptions no matter which news story participants viewed (see Means in Table 3). For all news stories, both measures of third-person effects were significantly greater than zero.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis H1 focused on how the perceived negativity of the news story affects third-person perceptions. The hypothesis predicted that participants viewing a

news story about a point of view opposing their own would perceive the news story as negative, and therefore experience significantly greater third-person perceptions than would participants viewing a news story about their own point of view.

The first hypothesis predicted that exposure to television news stories about abortion protests would be associated with third-person effects. This hypothesis was tested using two measures of third-person effects. Because this study is concerned about the impact of social distance on third-person effects, I assessed third-person effects based on the difference in perceived impact on the self versus “the average American” (TPE-A) and the difference in perceived impact on the self versus “other participants in this study” (TPE-S). Overall, this hypothesis was supported. The study did find a significant third-person perception: TPE-A: $M = 1.25$, $t(266) = 10.06$, $p < .001$; TPE-S: $M = 0.63$, $t(266) = 5.34$, $p < .001$. I used a two factor analysis of variance (stance on abortion, news story) to test the influence of negativity on third-person perceptions. Because gender and attitudes about protests in general can affect reactions to news stories (Gallup Organization, 2000; McLeod, 1995), gender and attitudes about protests were used as covariates.

Third-person Effect on the Self Versus the Average American

The results of the ANOVA revealed no significant effects for news story ($F[3, 257] = 0.70$, $p = .61$), for stance on abortion ($F[1, 257] = 0.77$, $p = .45$), or for attitudes about protest ($F[1, 257] = 0.92$, $p = .34$). Gender was a significant covariate ($F[1, 257] = 6.10$, $p < .05$). There was a significant news story by stance on abortion interaction ($F[1, 257] = 7.77$, $p < .001$).

In order to explore the interaction, separate univariate analyses of variance explored the effect of news story on pro life and pro choice participants. Among pro

life participants, there were no significant effects for news story ($F[3, 131] = 1.14, p = .34$), gender ($F[1, 131] = 3.61, p = .06$), or attitudes about protest ($F[1, 131] = .39, p = .54$). For the pro choice participants, however, while there were no effects for gender ($F[1, 124] = 2.51, p = .12$) or attitudes about protest ($F[1, 124] = .49, p = .49$), there was a significant effect for condition ($F[3, 124] = 10.30, p < .001$). Post-hoc tests using Bonferroni corrections to protect against type I error revealed that those pro choice participants who saw news story 3 (pro life positive) had significantly greater third-person perceptions ($M = 2.52$) than pro choice participants who watched news story 1 (pro choice positive) ($M = 1.00$) or news story 2 (pro choice negative) ($M = 0.07$). Pro choice participants who watched news story 4 (pro life negative) had significantly greater third-person perceptions ($M = 2.29$) than those who watched news story 2 (pro choice negative). Group means are summarized in Table 3

Overall, pro choice participants experienced a greater third-person differential when they viewed a pro life news story portrayed positively, than they did when they viewed either of the pro choice news stories. In addition, there was a greater third-person differential when pro choice participants viewed the pro life protest portrayed negatively than when they viewed their own point of view portrayed positively.

Table 3 Third-person Effects on the Self Versus the Average American

Means				
	Pro choice news story		Pro life news story	
	Positive treatment	Negative treatment	Positive treatment	Negative treatment
Males	1.47	1.33	2.23	1.47
Females	0.60	0.63	1.36	2.00
Pro life	0.64	1.37	0.78	1.26
Pro choice	1.00	0.07	2.52	2.29
Overall	0.81	0.82	1.58	1.86

Third-person Effects on the Self Versus Other Participants in This Study

The results of the ANOVA revealed no significant effects for news story ($F[3,257] = 1.11, p = .47$) or for stance on abortion ($F[1, 257] = 3.77, p = .15$). Attitudes about protest ($F[1, 257] = 7.81, p < .01$) and gender ($F[1, 257] = 6.34, p < .05$) were significant covariates. There was a significant news story by stance on abortion interaction ($F[1, 257] = 3.95, p < .01$).

In order to explore the interaction, separate univariate analyses of variance explored the effect of news story on pro life and pro choice participants. There were no significant effects for news story ($F[3, 131] = .77, p = .51$) for pro life participants, although gender ($F[1, 131] = 4.76, p < .05$) and attitudes about protest ($F[1, 131] = 9.35, p < .01$) remained significant covariates. For the pro choice participants, however, while there were no effects for gender ($F[1, 124] = 2.33, p = .13$) or attitudes about protest ($F[1, 124] = 1.18, p = .28$), there was a significant effect for condition ($F[3, 124] = 6.04, p < .001$). Table 4 summarizes the group means.

Post- hoc tests using Bonferroni corrections to protect against type I error revealed that those pro life participants who saw news story 2 (pro choice negative) had significantly smaller third-person perceptions ($M = - 0.71$) than pro choice participants who watched news story 3 (pro life positive) ($M = 1.71$) or news story 4 (pro life negative) ($M = 1.05$). In fact, those pro choice participants who watched news story 2 (pro choice negative) exhibited a small first-person effect that did not reach significance. Overall, pro choice participants had greater third-person differentials when they viewed either pro life story (positive or negative) than when they viewed their own story portrayed negatively. In addition, those pro choice participants who viewed their own story portrayed negatively were likely to think they were more affected by the news story than were other participants.

Table 4 Third-person Effects on the Self Versus Other Participants in This Study

Means				
	Pro choice news story		Pro life news story	
	Positive Treatment	Negative Treatment	Positive treatment	Negative treatment
Males	0.71	0.72	1.18	1.10
Females	0.29	0.06	0.67	1.25
Pro life	0.03	0.32	0.00	0.67
Pro choice	0.79	-0.07	1.71	1.58
Overall	0.39	0.15	0.80	1.20

Research Question 2

Research question 2 queried whether this study could evoke a first-person perception when participants saw the news story to be prosocial. Because the

participants could judge the nature of the news story rather than having it judged a priori by the researcher, this study provided a framework in which a first-person perception could occur. The study predicted that when a participant saw his/her own point of view portrayed positively, there would be a first-person perception. The findings show that no first-person perceptions occurred in this study. See Tables 3 and 4.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that third-person differentials would become larger as participants' comparison groups grew farther away in social distance. To test this hypothesis, a paired sample *t*-test was conducted. The categories used for comparison were "you," other students in the study, and the average American. The results of this test showed support for this hypothesis – as social distance between participants and others grew, so did the size of the third-person differential. Participants perceived a larger third-person differential when compared to other Americans ($M = 1.26$) than to other students in this study ($M = .63$), $t(266) = 6.66, p < .001$.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 tested the link between attitude extremity and perceived biases. This hypothesis predicted that when attitudes toward abortion grow stronger, participants would be more likely to perceive greater biases in news stories against their own opinions. The Pearson's correlation used to test this hypothesis showed no support for H3a ($r = -.03, p = .30$).

Hypothesis 3b predicted that when participants perceived biases against their own point of view, they would be more likely to think the message was negative or

antisocial. Again, the hypothesis was tested using a Pearson correlation, which showed support for the hypothesis. There was a significant correlation between perceptions of news story bias and perceptions that the story was antisocial ($r = .36, p > .001$).

The final aspect of the third hypothesis predicted that as participants' attitudes became more extreme, they would be more likely to think certain stories were negative or antisocial. This hypothesis regarding attitude extremity was not supported ($r = .005, p = .46$).

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4a measured the link between third-person differentials and their effect on perceived biases in news stories. It was hypothesized that as third-person differentials grow larger, participants would be more likely to think a news story is negative or antisocial. The Pearson correlation supported this hypothesis for both measures of third-person differentials. Support was found when students compared themselves to other Americans ($r = -.15, p < .01$), and when they compared themselves to other University students ($r = -.23, p < .001$).

Hypothesis 4b evaluated the relationship of attitude to third-person differentials. It hypothesized that as attitudes grow stronger, third-person differentials would grow larger. The results of the Pearson's correlation did not support this hypothesis; there was no link between attitude extremity and the size of third-person differentials in relation to other Americans ($r = .02, p = .40$) or in relation to other students ($r = .04, p = .29$).

Hypothesis 5

H5a predicted a positive relationship between third-person differentials and criticism of the protesters in the news story. Once again, two Pearson correlations were run, one of which tested the differential between the self and other participants in the study, and the other tested the differential between the participants and the average American. These correlations showed support for both measures of third-person differentials; as third-person differentials became larger, so did the tendency to be critical of protesters in the news story: for the average American ($r = .20, p > .001$) and for other participants in the study ($r = .17, p > .01$).

H5b predicted a negative relationship between third-person differentials and identification with protesters' viewpoints. This hypothesis again tested third-person perceptions for both the average American and other students in the study using Pearson's correlations. In both cases, third-person differentials were significantly and negatively related to identification of participants with the protesters in the news story. Results were significant for other participants in the study ($r = -.32, p > .001$) and for the average American ($r = -.40, p > .001$).

Hypothesis 6

The sixth hypothesis of this study attempted to link the third-person perception to the third-person effects, or behavioral outcomes of the perception. It predicted that as third-person differentials increase, support for the expressive rights of protesters would decrease. The Pearson correlation showed no support for this prediction in either category of third-person differentials. Results revealed no significant relationship for "you versus other participants in the study" ($r = -.06, p > .18$) or for "you versus the average American" ($r = -.01, p > .41$).

Hypothesis 7

The final hypothesis predicted that the size of third-person differentials would be inversely related to the extent to which participants found the protest to be a newsworthy story. In both third-person measures, a Pearson correlation showed a significant inverse relationship between third-person differentials and perceived newsworthiness: for average Americans ($r = -.20, p > .001$) and for other participants in this study ($r = -.23, p > .001$).

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Third-person Perception

Third-person effects and perceptions have been studied within many contexts. While previous third-person research has focused on clearly harmful content such as violent television or music lyrics, this study analyzed news media coverage of social protest. The topic of social protest has been examined in the general area of media effects research; however, it presents a new topic for third-person research. Because this content is not as clearly harmful as that used in other third-person research, one of the goals of this study was to see whether news coverage of social protest would evoke a third-person perception, and if so, what effects could be linked to that perception. The findings of this study show that from exposure to news stories about social protest, third-person perceptions and effects do exist to some degree.

In previous third-person studies, support for the existence of third-person perceptions has been robust among negative stimuli (Gunther, 1991; Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Hwa, 1996; Lo & Wei, 2002; McLeod et al., 1997; Price et al., 1998; Salwen, 1998; Salwen & Driscoll, 1997). This study also found an overall third-person effect for exposure to news stories about protest. In all cases, participants felt others would be significantly more affected than they themselves would be affected by watching the news story. The major question of this study, however, focused on how third-person differentials would be affected by participants' perceptions of negativity

of the news story. Results revealed that the third-person perceptions of pro choice and pro life participants differed based on the news story that they viewed.

Pro life participants were affected according to their gender and prior attitudes toward protest. In comparing the means for gender, males were more likely to exhibit third-person perceptions than were females. However, while gender proved to be a significant covariate, the comparison between male and female third-person perceptions revealed only nearly significant differences between male and female participants.

Results from participants in the pro choice group, however, complied with the hypothesized predictions of H1. Pro choice participants were shown to exhibit third-person perceptions based on the condition or treatment of the news story they viewed. As predicted, when pro-choice participants saw a pro life protest portrayed positively, they were more likely to have a third-person perception than they were when they viewed either pro choice story. This corresponds to the conditions of Hypothesis 1, which predicted that pro choice participants would think the pro life story would have more of an effect on others, and would be more likely to exhibit a third-person perception when viewing that news story. In addition, results indicated that third-person differentials were more prevalent when participants viewed either pro life story than they were when participants viewed their own side, even if it was portrayed negatively. Perhaps participants were focused on the general topic, rather than the treatment of the story at hand, and therefore reported third-person perceptions whenever they saw any content regarding the pro life argument.

First-person Perception

The major theoretical grounding for third-person perception is ego-enhancement theory, which maintains the idea that people behave in ways that help foster positive feelings about themselves. These behaviors often include a self-serving bias, which includes the use of distorted perceptions of the self and social relationships. When applied to the third-person effect, then, this theory would posit that participants think others are more affected by harmful content than they themselves are affected in order to create positive or superior feelings about themselves (Brown, 1986; Zuckerman, 1979).

While the majority of research has dealt with harmful media content, it is logical to assume that these concepts of ego-enhancement and self-serving biases would extend to positive or prosocial media content as well. According to this theoretical grounding, when faced with prosocial content, participants should report a first-person effect, which means they would consider themselves to be more affected by the positive content than are people in other comparison groups (Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Gunther & Thorson, 1992).

This study differed from many other third-person studies in the fact that it contained both antisocial or harmful and prosocial media content. In addition, this study did not assume a priori which content would be considered good or bad; rather, it allowed the participants to decide the valence of the content, and how they believed it would affect both themselves and others. It was the original belief that this study would be helpful in fleshing out earlier mixed results regarding first-person effects.

Unfortunately, the results of this study do little to explain the debate concerning first person research. There was a small first-person effect found in this study, however, it was only found in the pro choice participants who viewed their own side of the story

portrayed negatively. To support the notion of ego-enhancement, pro choice participants should have reported a first-person effect when they saw their own point of view portrayed positively. In addition, there were no other first-person effects reported in any of the other conditions of this study. This finding appears to do more to contradict the ego-enhancement theory than it does to help provide support. Failure to show support for first-person effects also provides obstacles for third-person effects, due to the fact that they depend upon the same theoretical grounding. If future studies cannot show support for the first-person effect, other explanations and theoretical groundings should be explored in third-person research.

Third-person Effects

Although third-person perceptions are interesting findings, their true value lies in their connection to the behavioral outcomes of those perceptions. In prior research, the effects have included the desire to censor certain media content or change public policy (Davison, 1983). This research did find some behavioral consequences of third-person perceptions, although they are not quite as blatant as some others in previous research. Still while these indicators of third-person effects may be subtle, the impact of those effects could be far reaching to society as a whole.

This study measured the behavioral outcomes of third-person perceptions in a few ways: (a) how critical participants were of the protesters after seeing the news story; (b) how likely participants would be to identify with the protesters' message; (c) the extent to which they would support the expressive rights of protesters; and (d) participants' judgment about the newsworthiness of the protest. Hypotheses 5-7 tested if these outcomes were related to the size of third-person differentials. For example, as the size of third-person differentials increased, it was predicted that the criticism of

the protesters would also increase, but that identification with the protesters, support for expressive rights, and the amount of perceived newsworthiness would decrease.

Only one of these predictions was not supported; increased third-person differentials were not related to support for protesters' expressive rights. It would seem that this measure was the clearest indicator of a desire for censorship, and it was not supported. The three remaining hypotheses, however, were supported by this study's data. Participants who exhibited third-person differentials were more likely to be critical of protesters, were less likely to identify with the protesters, and were less likely to think the story was newsworthy.

These somewhat contradictory results might be explained by the interlinkage of framing, hegemony, agenda setting, and gatekeeping. Gitlin (1985) showed that through framing, media sources have an effect on the way the audience perceives an event. Therefore, the way a protest movement is framed could have a tremendous impact on the success or failure of that movement (Gitlin, 19985; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Shoemaker, 1984). Framing, combined with the concept of hegemony, could potentially keep smaller groups in society, such as protest groups, in a subordinate position in society, while maintaining the power of the upper classes (Gitlin, 1985).

Hegemony refers to the ideological domination of a ruling class over subordinate classes in society (Gramsci, 1971). This domination is not always deliberate, but exists none-the-less, and is generally supported by both the dominant and subordinate classes. Ruling class ideologies become so ingrained in people from birth, that both classes come to believe and reinforce the unequal balance of power and opinion in society (Gramsci, 1971).

The results of this study show that participants' support for protesters' expressive rights was not affected by seeing a news story, regardless of whether they agreed with it or not. This finding would seem to indicate that participants show some support for the normative belief of an equal and democratic society. This conclusion, however, needs to be tempered by other results. Higher third-person differentials were linked to more critical views of protesters and less identification with the protest groups in the study. In addition, higher third-person differentials were related to judging the protest story as less newsworthy. These findings can be seen as evidence of indirect, subtle types of censorship.

Hegemony theorists might explain that generally people are socialized to accept a normative belief in a democratic society, where a free marketplace of ideas is one to which everyone has equal access. Therefore, they might think that regardless of whether they agree or disagree with protesters in question, they still support their right to express their opinions in society. However, the results of the study show that while participants might support the expressive rights of these protesters, they do not seem to believe the message of the protesters is worth covering in the news. Not believing a protest is newsworthy is a subtle way to censor the messages of these protesters, rather than outrightly admonishing their right to express themselves.

Because protesters rely very heavily on the media to get their message out to the public, without adequate and fair media coverage, the message could never reach the same wide scope of people in society, and would therefore not be as effective (Gitlin, 1985; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Shoemaker, 1984). Links to decreased perceived newsworthiness may be a more effective expression of censorship than other direct indicators.

Theorists of mass communication have proposed that the media engage in an agenda-setting function (McCombes & Shaw, 1972). The agenda-setting hypothesis states that the media tell us what to think about in society by covering what events in the world they deem to be important. It does not state that the media tell the viewers how to think about the topic, but rather that certain events are worthy of consideration. Gitlin proposes, however, that the media are not always objective in what they choose to cover, nor are they unaffected by the demands of the public. He posits that the dominant sector of society expresses itself not directly, but through the media. The media facilitate and maintain hegemony through a series of editors and journalists who participate in the gatekeeping function of selecting and interpreting events (Gitlin, 1985).

Based on the concepts of hegemony, framing, agenda setting, and gatekeeping, it becomes more apparent how subtle third-person effects could reach farther than originally thought. In the case of this study, the fact that people were more critical of the protesters in questions, less likely to identify with them, and less likely to think their story was newsworthy could be very detrimental to the message of a protest group. In fact, it would be possible for the media to reinforce hegemonic viewpoints in society and hinder the ability of a protest group to disseminate a message, all while maintaining what appears to be a high level of objectivity

The Social Distance Corollary

In studying third-person effects, one of the goals is attempting to explain why people exhibit third-person perceptions. The most dominant explanation for third-person perceptions is the social distance corollary, which states that when estimating the effects of media content on the self and others, people will be likely to think that

people in groups that are farther away from them in social distance will be more affected than groups of people who are similar to them (Cohen et al., 1988). This social distance corollary has had a great deal of support in research on third-person effects (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Cohen et al., 1988; Gibbon & Durkin, 1995; Gunther, 1999; Lo & Wei, 2002). This study was an attempt to replicate prior research findings, and the results did show support for the social distance corollary. The comparison groups within this study were divided into “other participants in this study” and “the average American.” The findings of this study reflect that participants were significantly more likely to think that people farther away in social distance would be more affected than were groups of people who were more similar to them.

Although replication is important in social science research, future studies should attempt to explore new explanations for third-person differentials. Eveland and McLeod propose a model in which the third-person differential is a function of age and perceived exposure to media content, rather than social distance (2000). Their study showed that when presented with violent rap lyrics, subjects rated groups younger than their own age group as being more affected by media content and older groups as being less affected than were groups of their own age. These findings directly challenge the premise of the social distance corollary. For the social distance corollary to be applied to age, the groups farthest in age from the subjects’ own age group would be perceived to be the most affected by the message. This would mean groups much younger and much older would be most affected, with the participants’ own age group being least affected. This study found, however, that the perceived impact was linear, with the youngest affected most and the oldest groups affected least -- the subjects’ own age group factored somewhere between the two. The findings of

this study indicate that the third-person perception is linked to perceived exposure to the media content, rather than to social distance (Eveland and McLeod, 2000).

The idea of perceived exposure to media content provides some useful insights for future third-person research. However, it is important to note that what accounts for third-person differentials is most likely context specific. Perceived exposure may not be able to account for a third-person study concerning news stories, where most people are exposed to such content at some time. Future studies of this type should explore both standard explanations, such as social distance, as well as new perspectives such as perceived exposure to media content.

Limitations

Attitude Extremity

One of the problems I encountered in conducting this study was in measuring and linking attitude extremity to third-person differentials. According to prior research dealing with the hostile media environment, people will often think that the media are supporting the point of view that opposes their own, rather than thinking the media are supporting their side (Vallone et al., 1985). Further, the tendency to think others are persuaded against one's viewpoint grows stronger as opinions grow stronger (Perloff, 1989).

These prior findings made a strong case that in this study, as attitude extremity increased, third-person differentials would also increase. When participants are more involved in a topic, they will be more likely to think others are more affected than themselves by the media content they see. Further, attitude extremity could affect the extent to which participants view media content to be negative or antisocial. When

participants who are ego-involved see a video that presents either their own point of view negatively, or the opposing point of view positively, they will be more likely to think that content is antisocial.

In this study, on the other hand, attitude extremity did not have an effect on either the size of third-person differentials or news story bias. Participants were not more likely to think that others would be more affected than themselves when their opinions on the issue were stronger. In addition, participants were not more likely to think the news story was biased against their own opinion, or that the content was negative or antisocial as a result of increasing attitude extremity. Of the hypotheses in this study, the three that concerned attitude extremity were not supported by this study's data.

One potential explanation is that this study contradicts prior research, and that attitude extremity or ego-involvement does not play an important role in either perceived impact or news story bias. A more likely explanation, however, is that attitude extremity was not adequately measured in this study. I measured attitude extremity using one question on a nine-point scale, which asked participants how strongly they felt about the abortion issue. A future study could attempt to use a multi-item scale to gauge participants' attitude extremity, rather than just asking a single question.

Content Material

This study used abortion protest as its content referent material in hopes of evoking third-person perceptions and effects. One reason this material was selected was that the U.S. population is divided on the abortion issue in terms of political views (Gallup, 2000). This topic of abortion lends some novelty to third-person research.

Participants chose whether they thought the material was antisocial/harmful or prosocial in nature, rather than allowing the researcher to assume the material to be harmful or benign. Using this topic allowed me to more effectively understand participants' responses to the stimulus and questionnaire.

The fact that the content material is so clearly different from prior material may also be a limitation of this study, however. The topic of abortion is one that has caused much tension in society. The tension this issue has created in the past has manifested itself in extreme forms of protest, resulting in violence and even in death. For these reasons, it may be difficult to generalize the results of this study to protests in general. It is quite possible that a protest for environmental protection would not evoke the same responses from participants, because it does not have the power to induce the same tension among members of society. One question this study sought to answer was the possibility of finding a third-person effect when stimulus material was not as clearly harmful as that used in prior studies. The findings of this study indicate that this particular case did evoke a third-person perception and some effects. However, generalizing these results to all protest news coverage would be a premature assumption. Future studies should attempt to replicate these findings while using other types of protest news stories as the content referent material.

Sample

The original design of this thesis included a more "real world" sample, which would have consisted of participants who were recruited at a mall intercept and were offered gift certificates in exchange for their participation in the study. Responses to the questionnaires would have provided third-person research with some more generalizable findings, as most studies are conducted by using college student

samples. Attempts at collecting an outside population failed, however, due to difficulties with the mall intercept. For reasons of convenience, I decided to use a college student sample for this study. Using a student sample must be considered a limitation, because responses of a student sample are not representative of a real world population. In fact, a meta-analysis of third-person perceptions, conducted by Paul, Salwen, and Dupagne (2000), found that third-person perceptions found in non-random and college student samples were significantly larger than were those found in non-random and non-college student samples. This meta-analysis proposed that relying heavily on college student samples may threaten the external validity of a study (Paul et al., 2000). While the findings of this study do provide some insights to third-person perceptions and effects, future studies should attempt to gain an outside “real world” sample to enable more accurate generalizations to the population as a whole.

Conclusions

Overall, this study yielded some interesting findings pertaining to third-person research. First, like other studies on framing, this study too showed that the way the media frame a news story could have an effect on the way people perceive the protest groups in the story. This echoes previous literature in showing that the media hold the upper hand in their relationship between protesters and the public. Although this country maintains to hold a free marketplace of ideas and a democratic society, this finding indicates that we may not have as much of a voice as originally thought.

Rather, we as citizens, particularly those in minority groups, have a voice that is filtered through multiple gatekeepers who have the ability to subtly change a group’s intended message.

In addition to these findings pertaining to framing, interesting third-person perceptions and effects have also emerged from this study. Participants were likely to think that others were more affected than they themselves were affected in seeing certain news stories. Further, participants' responses indicated that third-person differentials would be likely to lead them to be critical of protesters, think the story had less value in terms of newsworthiness, and reduce their inclination to identify with the protesters in question.

These findings reveal that protesters face multiple pressures in disseminating a message to the public. Messages go through an intricate process of editing and filtering within the media circuit. So the final message delivered to the public may not be as originally intended by the group in question. Messages of protesters must pass through media gatekeepers, which may subject them to unpreventable framing procedures. In addition, protesters must face the fact that within this society, many people are ingrained from birth to subconsciously reject messages from groups in society that represent minorities. While participants might think they support a truly democratic society, results of this study indicate otherwise. Groups attempting to put out a message that strays from the mainstream may face many apparent and hidden obstacles. Future studies should expand on these findings to help uncover more efficient ways to allow protesters' messages to reach the public.

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Appendix A

SAMPLE VOICE OVER SCRIPTS

PRO CHOICE VOICE OVER

PRO CHOICE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)	PRO CHOICE STORY (PORTRAYED NEGATIVELY)
VOICE OVER: The Supreme Court yesterday, ruled on a case that barred federally funded health clinics from discussing abortion. The justices voted 6 to 3 to uphold federal restrictions barring clinic counselors from discussing abortion options with pregnant women.	VOICE OVER: The Supreme Court yesterday, ruled on a case that barred federally funded health clinics from discussing abortion. The justices voted 6 to 3 to uphold federal restrictions barring clinic counselors from discussing abortion options with pregnant women.
VO: The decision prompted citizen groups to express their reaction at a rally in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the National Organization of Women. The groups are motivated by the prospect of losing the civil rights that they have fought so hard for.	VO: The decision prompted feminist protesters to stage a demonstration in Washington, D.C., organized by the National Organization of Women. The protesters are driven by the fear of losing additional ground on the abortion issue.
NOW Vice President, Rosemary Dempsey: “We won’t go back, and we won’t go back on any of our rights, the rights that we have fought so hard for.”	VO: They say they refuse to negotiate any compromise to have the option of abortion.
VO: Abortion rights advocates gathered outside the Supreme Court to have their say, and then proceeded to march down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House to express their concerns to the President.	VO: The protesters gathered outside the Supreme Court to shout their objections, and then proceeded to march down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House to express their demands to the President.
VO: In a show of solidarity, the marchers rallied and listened to speeches outside the gates of the White House.	VO: To highlight their dissatisfaction, the demonstrators chanted slogans and listened to speeches outside of the White House.

PRO CHOICE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)	PRO CHOICE STORY (PORTRAYED NEGATIVELY)
VO: As expected, Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization of Women, was gently arrested.	VO: As a result of the disturbance, Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization of Women, had to be arrested.
VO: The pro choice groups are fueled by concern that as the Supreme Court approved the gag order on federally funded clinics, several state legislatures, including Michigan, Alabama, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are set to consider proposed limitations on a woman's right to an abortion. In some of those states, only a handful of votes could be crucial.	VO: Protesters are fueled by the concern that as the Supreme Court approved the gag order on federally funded clinics, several state legislatures, including Michigan, Alabama, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are set to consider proposed limitations on a woman's right to an abortion. In some of those states, only a handful of votes could be crucial.
National Abortion Rights Action League President, Kate Michelman: "It only takes one law in one state to reach the court to begin to unravel the rights for every woman in this country."	VO: The protesters argue that it only takes one law in one state to begin to unravel the rights for every woman in this country.
VO: Another spokesperson for the National Organization of Women said that the new laws will have negative consequences.	VO: Spokespersons for the National Organization of Women worry about the negative consequences of new laws on abortion.
Spokesperson for NOW: "It's very difficult to take freedom away. And I think you would see an uprising of women in this country. The odd thing of course, is that we would go back to where we were in the 50s and 60s when illegal abortion was the number one cause of death related to women and pregnancy."	VO: They say that limiting abortions would lead to an uprising, and they fear a return to the 50s and 60s when illegal abortion was the number one cause of death related to women and pregnancy.
VO: The large crowd of marchers in Washington today shows that citizens will respond when lawmakers try to erode abortion rights.	VO: The large crowd of demonstrators in Washington today shows that protesters will create a backlash against lawmakers who attempt to change abortion law.
VO: Policy makers couldn't help but notice the size of the crowd.	VO: Several Washington streets had to be closed to accommodate the size of the crowd.

PRO CHOICE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)	PRO CHOICE STORY (PORTRAYED NEGATIVELY)
VO: As workers in the downtown area went to lunch, many of them joined in the march. Together the marchers spoke loud enough for America to hear their collective voice.	VO: As workers in the downtown area went to lunch, many of them were frustrated by traffic jams caused by protesters. Despite the inconvenience they caused, protesters were determined to be heard.
VO: There are indications that America is willing to listen to their message. A survey by the Gallup Organization shows that over 2/3 of Americans support the position of the protesters.	VO: However, it is not clear whether Americans will be receptive to their message. Surveys do show that many Americans support the position of the protesters.
VO: In addition, phone banks at the White House were flooded with calls criticizing the Supreme Court's decision.	VO: However, phone banks at the White House were flooded with calls supporting the Supreme Court's decision.
VO: Encouraged by this support, the National Organization of Women vowed to continue their vigilance. Tomorrow many of these pro-choice marchers will walk the halls of congress to lobby for repeal of the federal gag order and for new legislation to protect a woman's right to abortion.	VO: NOW vowed to escalate their battle. Tomorrow, many of the pro-abortion activists will storm the halls of congress to lobby for a repeal of the federal gag order and for new legislation to keep them from losing further ground on the abortion issue.
	VO: This is Avery Hill reporting for WKTU News.

PRO LIFE VOICE OVER

PRO LIFE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)	PRO LIFE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)
VO: The Supreme Court ruled yesterday on a case that permits federal funding for abortion. Justices voted 6-3 to uphold a federal program that permits low income adults with money to pay for first trimester abortions.	VO: The Supreme Court ruled yesterday on a case that permits federal funding for abortion. Justices voted 6-3 to uphold a federal program that provides low income adults with money to pay for their first trimester abortions.
VO: The decision prompted citizens groups to express their reactions at a march in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the National Right to Life Committee.	VO: The decision prompted a demonstration in Washington, D.C., organized by the National Right to Life Committee.
VO: The groups were motivated by the prospect of an increase in the number of abortions performed.	VO: The protesters were driven by the fear of losing additional ground on the abortion issue.
Bystander: “I just don’t think it should as readily accessible as it is, where people might be using it as birth control.”	
VO: National Right to Life advocates gathered outside the Supreme Court to have their say and then proceed to march by the capital and down Pennsylvania Avenue to express their concerns to the President.	VO: They gathered outside the Supreme Court to shout their objections and then proceeded to march by the capital and then down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House to express their demands to the President.
VO: In a show of solidarity, the marchers rallied and listened to speeches on the lawn of the White House.	VO: To highlight their dissatisfaction, the demonstrators chanted slogans and listened to speeches on the lawn of the White House.
VO: As expected, members of the National Right to Life Committee were arrested.	VO: As a result of the disturbances, members of the National Right to Life Committee had to be arrested.
VO: In addition to approving federal funding for abortion, the Supreme Court also upheld restrictions on the right to protest in front of abortion clinics.	VO: In addition to approving federal funding for abortion, the Supreme Court also upheld restrictions on protest in front of abortion clinics.

PRO LIFE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)	PRO LIFE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)
Keith Tucci, Executive Director, Operation Rescue: “This is a judicial gag order, is what this is. And we’re not gonna be gagged.”	VO: The decision protects women’s access to reproductive health services.
VO: Another spokes person for the National Right to Life Committee said that through the efforts of pro-life protesters, the abortion issue will eventually turn.	VO: Spokespersons for the National Right to Life committee consider this to be a setback to their cause.
Speaker at a rally: “I am convinced Roe will fall by the end of this presidential term and child killing will be driven back to hell where it came from.”	VO: They vow that until they get their way, they will continue to make trouble.
VO: The large crowd of marchers in Washington today shows that citizens will respond when law makers attempt to provide funding for abortion.	VO: The large crowd of demonstrators in Washington today shows that protesters will create a backlash against law makers who attempt to revive funding for abortion.
VO: Policy makers couldn’t help but notice the size of the crowd. As workers in the downtown area went to lunch, many of them joined in the march.	VO: Several Washington streets had to be closed to accommodate the size of the crowd. As workers in the downtown area went to lunch, many of them were frustrated by traffic jams caused by the protest.
VO: Three overly enthusiastic marchers were arrested for disturbing the peace.	VO: Police arrested three of the protesters for disturbing the peace.
VO: Nevertheless, the marchers got their point of view across and there are indications that America is willing to listen to their message.	Patricia Baird-Windle, Clinic Director: “Part of me is very pleased that they have started to arrest. Another part of me is extraordinarily unhappy that the streets are clogged.”
VO: A survey by the Gallup Organization shows that many Americans support the position of the protesters.	VO: Despite the inconvenience they caused, protesters were determined to be heard. However, it is not clear whether Americans will be receptive to their message. Surveys show that many Americans do not support the position of the protesters.

PRO LIFE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)	PRO LIFE STORY (PORTRAYED POSITIVELY)
VO: In addition, phone banks at the White House were flooded with calls criticizing the Supreme Court's decision.	VO: Phone banks at the White House were flooded with calls supporting the Supreme Court's decision.
VO: Encouraged by this support, the National Right to Life Committee vowed to continue their vigilance.	VO: The National Right to Life Committee vows to escalate their battle.
VO: Tomorrow, many of these pro-life marchers will walk the halls of congress to lobby for the repeal of the federal funding program and for new legislation to restrict the practice of abortion.	VO: Tomorrow, many of these pro-life activists will storm the halls of congress to lobby for the repeal of the federal funding program and for new legislation to restrict abortion rights.

Appendix B

NEWS STUDY

DEPARTMENT OF COMUNICATION

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

1. We would like you to think about your opinion on the abortion issue. Please mark one of the spaces below to indicate where your opinion would fall:

STRONGLY PRO-LIFE _____ STRONGLY PRO-CHOICE

2. On a scale from “0” to “9,” circle the number that indicates **HOW STRONGLY YOU FEEL** on the abortion issue.

VERY STRONGLY 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 NOT STRONGLY AT ALL

3. On a scale from “0” to “9” how much **KNOWLEDGE** do you feel you have on the abortion issue?

A LOT OF KNOWLEDGE 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 NOT MUCH KNOWLEDGE

Please think about the following statements and circle the number indicating whether you **Strongly agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, feel **Neutral (N)**, **Disagree (D)**, or **Strongly Disagree (SD)**:

- | | <u>SA</u> | <u>A</u> | <u>N</u> | <u>D</u> | <u>SD</u> |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 4. Abortion is wrong under any circumstances. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. The abortion issue is really about the ability of a woman to decide what to do with her own body. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

6. The abortion issue is really about protecting lives of unborn children. 5 4 3 2 1

7. A woman should have the right to abortion if there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby. 5 4 3 2 1

8. A woman should have the right to abortion if she is married and does not want more children. 5 4 3 2 1

9. A woman should have the right to abortion if the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy. 5 4 3 2 1

10. A woman should have the right to abortion if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children. 5 4 3 2 1

11. A woman should have the right to an abortion if she became pregnant as a result of rape. 5 4 3 2 1

12. A woman should have the right to abortion if she is not married and does not want to marry the baby's father. 5 4 3 2 1

13. A woman should have the right to abortion if the woman wants it for any reason. 5 4 3 2 1

14. Overall, how much would you say YOUR opinion on the abortion issue is likely to change during the next few years?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
NOT AT ALL A GREAT DEAL

15. Overall, how much would you say that the opinions on the abortion issue of OTHER PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY are likely to change during the next few years?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
NOT AT ALL A GREAT DEAL

16. Overall, how much would you say that the opinion of THE AVERAGE AMERICAN on the abortion issue is likely to change during the next few years?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
NOT AT ALL **A GREAT DEAL**

Now please think about protests in *general*. For each of the following statements, please circle the number that indicates whether you **Strongly Agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, **feel neutral (N)**, **Disagree (D)**, or **Strongly Disagree (SD)**:

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
17. Protests are a waste of time.	5	4	3	2	1
18. Protesters are often disrespectful.	5	4	3	2	1
19. Protesters provide a useful service to our democracy.	5	4	3	2	1
20. Protesters are an effective way to influence politicians.	5	4	3	2	1
21. Protesters are an effective way to influence public opinion.	5	4	3	2	1
22. Protesters can offer new insights on certain issues.	5	4	3	2	1
23. Protesters tend to be annoying.	5	4	3	2	1
24. It is important to listen to protesters.	5	4	3	2	1
25. Protesters are out to cause trouble.	5	4	3	2	1
26. I've heard all that I want to about protests.	5	4	3	2	1
27. Protesters often bring issues to my attention.	5	4	3	2	1

28. On the following scale, how interested are you in politics?

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
VERY INTERESTED NOT AT ALL

29. On the following scale, how much would you say you were concerned with the outcome of the last presidential election?

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
VERY INTERESTED NOT AT ALL

30. How would you characterize your political identification? (Please check one):

_____	Strong Republican	_____	Lean Republican	_____	Independent
_____	Lean Democrat	_____	Strong Democrat	_____	Other

31. The terms “liberal” and “conservative” may mean different things to people depending on the kind of issue on is considering. In terms of economic issues, would you say you are (Please check one):

____ Very Liberal ____ Liberal ____ Somewhat Liberal ____ Neutral

____ Somewhat Conservative ____ Conservative ____ Very Conservative

32. Now, thinking in terms of social issues, would you say you are (Please check one):

	Very Liberal		Liberal		Somewhat Liberal		Neutral
	Somewhat Conservative		Conservative		Somewhat Conservative		Very Conservative

33. How many days in the last seven did you read a newspaper?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34. About how much time did you spend watching television news on a typical day?
 _____hours _____minutes

35. What is your current year at the University of Delaware? (Please check one):

_____Freshman _____Sophomore _____Junior _____Senior _____Other

36. What was your age on your last birthday? _____

37. What is your gender? _____Male _____Female

The television news broadcast that you just saw had a story about a group of protesters. Please think about this news story and the people involved and circle the number indicating whether you **Strongly Agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, **feel Neutral (N)**, **Disagree (D)**, or **Strongly Disagree (SD)** with the following statements:

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
38. I share some of the protesters' viewpoints	5	4	3	2	1
39. The protesters were violent.	5	4	3	2	1
40. I would consider getting involved with a group who supported causes similar to the protesters'.	5	4	3	2	1
41. The protesters were trouble-makers.	5	4	3	2	1
42. The protesters' actions were justified.	5	4	3	2	1
43. The protesters' views were very radical	5	4	3	2	1
44. I felt sorry for the protesters because of the way they treated by this news story.	5	4	3	2	1
45. These protesters were disrespectful.	5	4	3	2	1
46. These protesters are annoying.	5	4	3	2	1
47. These protesters are out to cause trouble.	5	4	3	2	1
48. These protesters have a right to protest.	5	4	3	2	1

49. These protesters should not be allowed to protest in public places.	5	4	3	2	1
50. These protesters have a right to be heard.	5	4	3	2	1
51. The media should provide these protesters with the means to be heard.	5	4	3	2	1
52. The media should not encourage these protesters by giving them attention.	5	4	3	2	1
53. It is the media's obligation to cover this protest.	5	4	3	2	1
54. News stories about this protest aren't of interest to the public.	5	4	3	2	1
55. The news story about this protest is relatively important compared to other stories on television news.	5	4	3	2	1
56. The news media should cover other stories rather than this protest.	5	4	3	2	1
57. I agree with most of what the protesters stand for.	5	4	3	2	1

58. Answer the next question with a percentage ranging from 0% to 100%.

_____ % Estimate the percentage of people in the U.S. population that agree with most of the protesters' viewpoints.

59. On the following scale, how CLOSE are your **beliefs** to those of the protesters? (Circle the number that reflects the closeness of your beliefs).

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
VERY CLOSE							NOT CLOSE AT ALL		

60. Think about the issues raised by the **protest group** in the news story that you just saw. Please use the following scale to indicate the extent to which you AGREE or DISAGREE with the **protest group**.

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
STRONGLY AGREE							STRONGLY DISAGREE		

61. On a scale from “0” to “9,” circle the number that indicates how you rate this **protest group** in terms of whether this **protest group** would have a POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE influence on society.

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
VERY POSITIVE						VERY NEGATIVE			

Shifting the topic a bit, now think about the protest **news story** you just saw.

62. On a scale from “0” to “9,” circle the number that indicates the extent to which the effect of watching **this news story** would be POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE.

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
VERY POSITIVE						VERY NEGATIVE			

63. Think about the tone of the protest **news story** that you just saw. Do you think the news story was slanted IN FAVOR OF or AGAINST the protesters?

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
IN FAVOR OF								AGAINST	

Please think about this news story and the people involved and circle the number indicating whether you **Strongly Agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, **feel Neutral (N)**, **Disagree (D)**, or **Strongly Disagree (SD)** with the following statements:

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
64: This news story is likely to turn the public against the protesters.	5	4	3	2	1
65. By giving publicity to this protest, this news story will generate public support for the protesters.	5	4	3	2	1

THE PROTEST NEWS STORY'S IMPACT ON YOU:

66. Overall, how much would you say that **YOU** were influenced by watching this news story?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
NOT AT ALL **A GREAT DEAL**

67. Please use the following scale to indicate whether the influence of this story made you more **IN FAVOR** or **AGAINST** the protest group.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
AGAINST THE **NO CHANGE** **IN FAVOR**
GROUP **OF THE GROUP**

**THE PROTEST NEWS STORY'S IMPACT ON
OTHER PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY:**

68. Overall, how much would you say that **OTHER PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY** were influenced by watching this news story?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
NOT AT ALL **A GREAT DEAL**

69. Please use the following scale to indicate whether the influence of this story would make them more **IN FAVOR** or more **AGAINST** the protest group.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4
AGAINST THE **NO CHANGE** **IN FAVOR**
GROUP **OF THE GROUP**

**THE PROTEST NEWS STORY'S IMPACT ON
THE AVERAGE AMERICAN**

70. Overall, how much would you say that **THE AVERAGE AMERICAN** was influenced by watching this news story?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
NOT AT ALL								A GREAT DEAL	

71. Please use the following scale to indicate whether the influence of this story would make them more **IN FAVOR** of or more **AGAINST** the protest group.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
AGAINST THE GROUP			NO CHANGE			IN FAVOR OF THE GROUP		

Appendix C

PERMISSION LETTER

From: Maria Palazuelos [mailto:no-reply@irbnet.org]
Sent: Monday, November 16, 2015 2:32 PM
To: Perse, Elizabeth M <eperse@udel.edu>
Subject: IRBNet Board Action

Please note that University of Delaware IRB has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [834758-1] The Third-person Effect in the Context of Media Coverage of Social Protest Principal Investigator: Amy Shupard, BA

Submission Type: New Project
Date Submitted: November 16, 2015

Action: EXEMPT
Effective Date: November 16, 2015
Review Type: Exempt Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Maria Palazuelos at mariapi@udel.edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

www.irbnet.org